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# INTRODUCTION: CAPTURING THE NEW DYNAMICS OF TURKISH TELEVISION SERIES. DISJUNCTIONS AND CONTINUITIES

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ECE VİTRİNEL  
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After three-decades of financial success, Turkish TV series have been recognized as a compelling agent in the global cultural milieu. With their increasing consumption and popularity in over 150 countries in the past two decades (Türkiye's series exports 2022), Turkish television series have attracted attention both nationally and globally. Earlier studies have explained this popularity as a result of novelty, cultural proximity, and new technological developments in the TV industry, such as the rise of VoD services and digital platforms and a consequent increase in demand for more content. However, the fact that the Turkish television industry remains among the globe's top five exporters of scripted content urges us to

take a closer look at these dramas. The collection of articles in this special issue of *Series: International Journal of TV Serial Narratives* aims to focus on the national and global significance of Turkish TV series by critically examining their social, cultural and ideological implications in Turkey and across the world. Considering new dynamics of Turkish TV and its disjunction and continuities, the authors explore the development of Turkish TV series as a national product, their distinct narratives, and what these dramas mean for audiences and publics within and outside Turkey from historical, regional and global perspectives.

The global success of Turkish TV series raises new areas of inquiry into the changing contours of circulation, distribution and production practices among emerging national TV industries, including the novel narratives produced along with their impact on global audiences. The unique storytelling style and themes of Turkish dramas have been particularly sought after by audiences across the world (Öztürkmen 2022; Acosta-Alzuru 2021), causing political debates and igniting cultural rifts in Turkey and abroad. Turkish TV series have been both praised and criticized for their representation of Islam (see Erkılıç & Duruel Erkılıç in this issue), gender (see Ferreira, Çaylı Rahte and Larochelle in this issue), minorities (see Erkılıç & Duruel Erkılıç in this issue), social classes (see Larochelle in this issue), cosmopolitanism, history and memory (see Erkılıç & Duruel Erkılıç and Uğur Tanrıöver in this issue). The narratives of these dramas are far from static as new hybrid forms and narratives have emerged as a result of socio-political changes in Turkey and the industry's response to government censorship (see Uğur Tanrıöver in this issue). In the past decade, the increase in the variety of genres and narratives has also been due to the Turkish TV industry catering its content to the tastes and preferences of global audiences in order to compete in the international TV markets, while at the same time establishing a distinct place for itself as a producer of dramas with unique stories, style and format.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF TELEVISION IN TURKEY: FROM NATIONAL TO TRANSNATIONAL

The very first national TV broadcasts in Turkey started with the establishment of the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) in 1964. Following the military coup of 1980, television gained importance in Turkish households at a time of great political turmoil and domestic

retreat (see Uğur Tanrıöver in this issue). The country's TV drama industry has grown exponentially since the 1990s, which coincided with the years that marked the launch of private TV channels. In the mid-2000s, the Turkish TV industry has met with broad international success (Kaptan and Algan 2020; Çelenk 2018; Ogan 1992). In addition to transforming its content to feature bigger budget dramas and expanding its audience reach, Turkey's TV industry also experienced drastic changes in the production, distribution and exhibition of its dramas since then. For instance, the number of TV production companies and its supporting industries, such as fashion, advertising, and technology, burgeoned rapidly during this time (Algan 2020).

In the second half of the 2010s, emerging digital platforms have opened a new path for the production and exhibition of Turkish dramas in a wide variety of genres like thrillers, fantasy dramas, romantic comedy, suspense, detective and crime fiction. Digital platforms created a tremendous impact on the globalization efforts of the Turkish TV industry (Vitrinel & Ildır 2021). Within six years following its introduction in Turkey in 2016, Netflix has become a major player as a content buyer, distributor and producer of Turkish dramas in an increasingly important, fragmented and competitive OTT landscape, which currently includes local platforms such as BluTV, Gain and Exxen and other global giants like Amazon Prime and Disney Plus. The OTT services in the country are mostly popular among urban middle- and upper-class audiences who prefer content produced for these platforms as opposed to the heavily-regulated, conservative content of national networks (Ildır & Çelik Rappas 2022). However, since Turkey still has a very strong traditional television viewing culture with TV sets accessible via antennas placed in living rooms, it is too early to claim that the dominance of broadcast and cable television has been severely challenged by the introduction of digital platforms. Additionally, it is important to note that the VoD services also began facing increasing regulatory pressure following Turkish parliament's approval of a law that expands RTÜK's (Turkey's broadcasting regulatory agency) control over Internet distribution in March 2018.

## A NEW PLAYER IN THE TRANSNATIONAL MARKETS: TURKISH TV SERIES

Even though the Turkish TV industry produces both scripted and unscripted content, scripted content, particularly TV dramas, are still its biggest exports. The narratives of Turkish dra-

mas display a thematic variety including romantic love, sexual harassment, marriage, adultery, family relations, social class issues, contrast between urban and rural lifestyles, religious beliefs, historical events, terrorism, mafia-government relations, and nationalism. The ways in which these themes are presented and represented, however, have been undergoing a significant transition due to a number of domestic factors. Such domestic factors are the launch of Netflix Türkiye and local streaming platforms, the shift of focus in AKP's domestic and foreign policies, the rise in dissemination of nationalist and religious content, increasing regulatory pressure over TV broadcasts, and the change in the TV ratings system that resulted in a measurement panel with a more conservative audience. Consequently, more conventional content that focuses on Turkish traditional family values and the 'glorious' historical past has flourished along with, what Iwabuchi (1998) refers to as, "culturally odorless" content through a wide variety of genres, such as thrillers, fantasy dramas, suspense, detective, and crime fiction. These changes in the domestic context have been further exacerbated by global demands, which compelled the industry to produce content for the global digital platforms that is capable of competing with a plethora of TV series in the international markets. The widening of the Turkish TV industry's global distribution has also resulted in Turkish TV series reaching diverse audiences from Europe to Africa, and from Latin America to Southwest Asia with various religious, cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds.

This special issue addresses the problem of representation in Turkish TV series as well as the past and current dynamics surrounding their production, distribution, and reception. By employing a variety of methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives, the contributors provide a critical assessment of the local and global transformations involving the content, meaning-making process and identity politics as well as disjunctions and continuities in the narrative structures and formats.

Our special issue starts with Hülya Uğur Tanrıöver's article, which traces the historical development of Turkish TV series, from the very first production by TRT in 1974 all the way to 2022. Surveying 102 dramas, Uğur Tanrıöver offers a sociological reading of the way narratives in Turkish dramas have changed in response to unique political, technological and socio-cultural transformations in Turkey. This comprehensive study is not only impressive in its scale of inquiry, but also sheds important light on the integral and interdependent relationship between television content and society.

In their contribution, Hakan Erkılıç and Senem Duruel Erkılıç analyze *Ethos* (2020), the critically acclaimed Netflix original. Drawing on the concepts of nostalgia and cognitive mapping, the authors examine in depth the hybrid narrative of this series built on the socio-cultural divide within Turkish society. By identifying the intertextuality between *Ethos* and the films of the 1970s, the music of the 1980s, as well as the New Turkish Cinema, Erkılıç and Duruel Erkılıç demonstrate the ways in which nostalgia is used both as a creative tool and a call for social confrontation in a highly polarized society where the people's hope to coexist has been severely damaged.

Our contributors also illustrate the diversity of the responses of both diasporic and transnational audiences to Turkish dramas. By employing in-depth interviews with Turkish TV drama audiences and bloggers, and executives at the Swedish public service television company (SVT) and the media distribution company Eccho Rights, Emek Çaylı Rahte examines why Turkish TV series appeal to Swedish and diaspora audiences residing in Sweden. Çaylı Rahte also explores the public debates around Turkish TV series in social media. The topics range from gender representations and stereotypes to cultural and traditional values in both societies.

Dimitra Laurence Larochelle analyzes the reception of Turkish TV series in Greece by focusing on Greek fans' resistant reading of social class representations. Larochelle illustrates how Greek audiences reject the dominant class hierarchies imposed on them by the capitalist system through the narratives of Turkish soap operas, which have traditionally represented working classes with dignity, resilience, and power.

Relying on data collected through online questionnaires among Facebook fan groups and conducting in-depth interviews, Gabrielle Camille Ferreira's article examines the case of a nationally and globally successful Turkish drama, *Fatmagul* (2010-2012) and its reception in Brazil. Ferreira illuminates how Brazilian audiences perceive the melodramatic structure and moral values in *Fatmagul* concerning controversial issues such as rape, romance, family values and women's empowerment.

Studying Turkish TV series offers insight into the social groups depicted within the programs as well as into the people who consume them globally. Our special issue illustrates this by tracing the impact of Turkish dramas from their journey through the socio-cultural and political environment of their creation in Turkey to their reception in Sweden, Greece and Brazil. By doing so, it provides a deeper understanding of the controversial discursive spaces surrounding Turkish TV series both inside and outside Turkey.

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# TOWARDS A SOCIAL HISTORY OF TURKEY THROUGH TELEVISION SERIES

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## KEYWORDS

TV genres; cultural history; social changes; political discourse; audiences.

## ABSTRACT

By taking a sociological perspective toward relationships between media products and social issues and relying on historical analysis of Turkish TV series in the last five decades, this article explores the transformation of Turkish TV series in the context of changing socio-political, cultural and economic milieu in Turkey. Focusing on 102 TV series broadcast between 1974 and 2022, it strives to understand

the social and political history of the country through the television series. The article concludes that while Turkish TV series have reflected the ever-changing political orientation of the government and constant cultural fluctuations of society in every epoch, the discourse, narrative and formats of TV series have undergone significant transformations due to the impact of socio-cultural and political issues, the development of the TV production and broadcasting sector, and cultural policies of the state in Turkey. In this case, Turkish TV series can help us to understand the failed attempt of the governments for creating a national community united around middle-class values in the 1980s and 1990s as well as the polarized structure of society in today's Turkey.

## INTRODUCTION

As one of the first researchers to work on television series in Turkey, I have conducted several studies in this field since the 1990s. It is this experience and the different ways of thinking that allowed me to start this research which aims to propose a preliminary roadmap for a “reading” (not to say “writing”) of the social history of Turkey through television series. This is in fact the prologue of a macro-sociological work of greater scope; a work in progress.

Taking as a basis a hypothesis built in an interdisciplinary dimension at the crossroads of the sociology of television and social history, according to which the characteristics of television series, in our case those produced in Turkey, are correlative to the socio-political evolutions of the period of their production and broadcasting, I asked myself the following questions: what are the changes observed in Turkish television series, from the beginning of their broadcasting to the present day; to which socio-political options or orientations of the country do these changes correspond? Do they constitute, and in what sense, answers to the needs of the actors of this system of production and reproduction of images and discourses?

My approach is, as I said, mainly sociological. Being interested in cinema, before giving rise to a sub-discipline devoted to television content, sociology questions, by virtue of its main object, the relations, even correlations between images and social reality (Goldman 1992: 38), and even other potentialities such as doing sociology by and through cinema (Durand and Sebag 2015). But it is not only sociologists who are interested in films, since cinema is becoming a material of the first order for historians who want to break with classical historiography. In France, for example, Ferro proposes through his pioneering work to make “a historical reading of the cinema and a cinematographic reading of history” (1977: 26), and many authors define in this sense the tasks of the historian, such as Garçon, who proposes him/her to enter a “mental universe” in order to see the relations between films and social life in the general sense (1992: 17).

In this article, I have limited my qualitative content analysis of Turkish TV series, which is a descriptive one, to the main lines such as the genre, the sub-genre, the main characters and the filmic language (narrative form; atmosphere; use of more or less sophisticated techniques). This choice is explained by the volume of the sample to be analyzed. Indeed, since I am reviewing the history of Turkish TV series which covers 48 years and concerns more than 1000 different productions,

some of which lasted for many seasons, it is technically impossible for me to claim to be exhaustive. Consequently, I refer in this article to 102 series that I consider as the most representative, either because they are prototypes in the history of series, or because they stand out from others due to their national or international popularity, and finally because they represent a political or cultural issue on their own, thus becoming symbols in their own right. The second method used is desk research (analysis of written sources, especially media information on series or on socio-political news) and literature review (on series and socio-political conditions).

I would also like to point out the limitations of this research, as they are numerous given the time period it covers and the disciplines to which it refers. First, even if comments are made about the climate of production and reception, these are general deductions and not detailed analyses in these two areas. Secondly, in spite of the very important number of sources and publications observed, I had to limit the bibliographical references here. Finally, in order not to make the text more cumbersome, I have not made explicit certain concepts that are taken for granted (for example, those of television genres; of globalization or soft power) and that appear in the sources to which I refer.

## 1. THE EMERGING TURKISH TELEVISION: A PUBLIC SERVICE IN SEARCH OF ORIGINAL CONTENTS

While Turkey (or more precisely the Ottoman Empire, since the present republic was only founded in 1923) became acquainted with cinema and radio almost at the same time as European countries and the United States, this was not the case for television. Television did not become part of people’s daily lives until the 1970s, and broadcasting was a public monopoly, as was radio<sup>1</sup>.

The volume and diversity of programming are linked, on the one hand, to technical and economic imperatives and, on the other, to the political will of the public power that governs broadcasting. As it was in other countries a few decades earlier, the broadcasting policy was “paternalistic”: The audience was considered as a crowd to be educated and the medium as a means of disseminating cultural, and above all educational, products. The limited broadcasting hours were

1 Many works exist on the history of television in Turkey. For a compact and chronological presentation see Uğur Tanrıöver 2011b.

devoted to rather informative content such as news, self-produced or commissioned documentaries. However, the public authorities did not deny the entertainment “function” of the small screen and made efforts to satisfy the needs of the audience even if it was very limited in the early 1970s because of the scarcity of TV set ownership.

Throughout this first period of television launch, the audience’s need for dramas was mainly satisfied by the reruns of popular films already released in theaters; original productions of literary adaptations<sup>2</sup> in TV movies; theater shows specially filmed for TV; and imported TV movies or series, which were either literary adaptations (especially of great Russian or British classics, etc.) or popular productions, especially those of the BBC. I would like to point out here that the desire to satisfy the audiences’ need for more entertainment content such as dramas does not mean that the television’s didactic mission had been abandoned. Thus, even during the short period (1974-1975) of the then general manager of the public broadcasting channel (TRT), İsmail Cem, the efforts for quality productions went hand in hand with the desire to meet the needs of the audience.

It was during 1974-1975 that TRT produced and broadcast the first Turkish television series: A family comedy, *Kaynanalar* (1974) and a melodrama from a literary adaptation, *Aşk-ı Memnu* (1975). When we consider the characteristics of these two productions, we see on the one hand what constitutes, and will continue to constitute even today some basic elements of Turkish “feature films/series”; and on the other, those that reflect the social and political options of their time.

The first of these basic elements that will somehow “resist” the various changes, and even transformations of the series, is the genre. This is certainly not unique to Turkey and the rich literature on series shows us that comedy and melodrama are the most popular genres. The adoption of these two genres first of all shows the commitment of TRT management to attract the audience to this new medium. Moreover, the fact that these two series have left their mark on the history of Turkish television fiction<sup>3</sup> is first and fore-

most related to the choice of genre. It is also worth noting that these genres are already those preferred by popular cinema, as Behlil (2010) and Toy Par (2022) point out.

These productions are conceived with short episodes (25-30 min) and on a classical, linear narration with theatrical acting (a cast consisting of big theater celebrities); written and directed by theater (Tekin Akmansoy) and film (Halit Refiğ) directors. The themes and diegesis are also significant: *Kaynanalar* takes up the very classic theme of the family comedy of Turkish cinema, as the main conflict the opposition of the traditional and the modern through the lifestyles of two families whose children are getting married, and deals with another theme by this occasion: the issue of adaptation to urban life of a traditional provincial family. As for *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*Forbidden Love*) adapted from the classic novel of the same name written in the previous century, it is a family drama around a young woman who has made a marriage of reason with an elderly and rich man, living a forbidden love, as the title indicates, with the latter’s cousin. In other words, here again the general theme is the most classic and the discourse is moralistic, as it suits the approach of the public channel.

The priority is to offer productions that are as cost-effective as possible without giving up on quality. So, these early local dramas are self-produced, with production crews made up of employees of the public channel but entrusted or commissioned to well-known filmmakers and scriptwriters<sup>4</sup>. With technical and financial means that are often insufficient, and lacking in professional staff and manpower, Turkey’s only public channel would remedy the need for series by buying foreign productions, in particular successful American and European programming, in order to satisfy the demand of an audience that is supposed to be<sup>5</sup> more and more important.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the interest of the audience was fed mainly by curiosity in front of this technological novelty that is TV and also by new forms of socialization created because of the scarcity of household equipment. Indeed, the neighborhood, already important as a value and as a form of communication in Turkey, took a new form: the TV visit. Particularly on days when there was a popular program, neighbors and friends who did not have a TV at home

2 On the subject of public television literary adaptations and telefilms in the early years of broadcast see Kale 2019.

3 *Kaynanalar* had, with interruptions, 14 seasons and 314 episodes, first on the public channel TRT and then on Kanal D, a private channel. *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*Forbidden Love*) had a remake in 2008-2010 on Kanal D and was one of the most popular productions of that period, with also a great success on international markets. For a comparison of these two versions of *Aşk-ı Memnu*, and especially for an analysis of the history and evolution of the series through these two versions, see Çelenk 2010.

4 İsmail Cem, Director of TRT in 1974-1975 explains in his memoirs this collaboration of the public channel with the confirmed filmmakers (Cem 1976: 59).

5 I use the term “supposed” because there were no studies or audience measurements at that time. The first “media survey” that also included television audiences was conducted in 1986 by a private market research institute (PIAR) with a team of researchers recruited for this work. I was the co-director of this study.

would go to visit those who do for a collective viewing session over a cup of tea, creating a “semi-public sphere within the domestic space” (Öztürkmen 2018: 3), and as discussed in the next section, this new practice also correlated with the general socio-political climate of the country which was on the verge of a civil war.

## 2. THE “HOME, HOME, SWEET PTT” YEARS: THE DOMESTIC WITHDRAWAL OF PEOPLE IN SEARCH OF COMFORT AND SECURITY

Political instability and the inability of successive governments to prevent acts of terrorism and clashes between opposing political groups served as a pretext for a military coup in 1980. This was going to be one of the darkest periods in the history of the republic. Most of the population sought refuge at home, fleeing the already dangerous public space, which had become even less safe under the curfew and the great repression by the military regime.

This climate, and the economic crisis that underlies it, had also hit the cinema, which was struggling to survive in the face of an audience who was deserting theaters to stay home and watch TV. The abbreviation PTT was invented at that time: Referring to the initials of Pyjamas, Terlik (meaning slippers in Turkish), and Television, it was used to translate this need of cocooning and feeling of home. The switch to color broadcasting in 1982 and the launch of a second channel (despite being not much different from the first) excited the audience even more, even if it required them to buy new color TV sets.

Tired of the chaos of the street, people discovered the fairy tale world of the great foreign series such as *Dallas* (1980), *Dynasty* (1981), *Love Boat* (1983), etc. in the evening, and when the broadcasting hours increased, that of telenovelas during the day. However, the television executives, due to their conservative and nationalist political position<sup>6</sup>, were concerned about the popularity of these productions, which were considered unfit for the moral and national values of the nation and made efforts to launch new local productions.

Thus, more than thirty (30) Turkish series were produced and broadcast in the 1980s. It should be noted, however, that almost all of these series were produced from 1984 onwards,

i.e. after the liberal-conservative party of Özal came to power after the (admittedly controlled and questionable) elections to replace the military government, promising a minimum of normalization.

When we look at these series, we first see that the trend of literary adaptations of classical authors is maintained (*Yaprak Dökümü* and *Çalığışu* by Reşat Nuri Güntekin, *Ateşten Gömlek* by Halide Edip Adivar, *Hanımın Çiftliği* by Orhan Kemal,<sup>7</sup> etc.), and adaptations by the works of contemporary authors have been added (*Küçük Ağa* and *Kuruluş Osmancık* by Tarık Buğra, *Samanyolu* by Kerime Nadir). Moreover, the fact that public TV produced an original series written by contemporary famous writers such as Atilla İlhan (*Kartallar Yüksek Uçar*, 1984) already shows us an important characteristic of these early series: they were the work of writers and not scriptwriters per se. These series-adaptations also had the particularity of being all dramas or melodramas, sometimes historical (*Küçük Ağa*, *Ateşten Gömlek*, *Kuruluş Osmancık*).

Among the series of this period, however, we also see comedies. Even though some historians categorize many of them as sit-coms, I think it would be wrong to label them as such. They are in fact family comedies, among which we also find serialized adaptations of plays, such as *Kuruntu Ailesi* or *Uğurlugiller*. For instance, *Kuruntu Ailesi* was produced for the theater<sup>8</sup> in Turkey based on an adaptation of Louis Verneuil’s play, *Madame Vidal’s Love*. Moreover, most of the scriptwriters of these series were theater writers. Let us note finally that a few series of other genres such as detective (*Mesela Muzaffer*, 1987) or science fiction (*Kavanozdaki Adam*, 1987; *Uzaylı Zekiye*, 1988), featuring elements of comedy at the same time, have also been broadcast but without much success.

The narrative and cinematographic characteristics of these series reflect their production conditions and especially their writing and follow the line of the first two series of 1974 and 1975: classic dramatic structure, theatrical aspect, linear narration. Except for a few, practically all the characters represent quite ordinary people with a physique of an “average Turk” and the casting corresponds to this realistic tone: a realism of middle classes. Even though there are a few movie stars, most of the performers come from the theater which

6 It should be noted that the management of public radio and television has been a major asset in the quarrels between the government and the opposition. For more details, see Tanrıöver 2003a.

7 These examples I have given have had remakes after the 2000s.

8 It was this filmed play that was first broadcast on TV in the form of three episodes; then, due to the popularity of the show, a series was commissioned from the team that produced and performed the theater show.

also explains the theatrical tone highlighted above. Another particularity that reinforces this aspect is the urban environment represented and the settings of the interiors forming the universe and creating the atmosphere of the series. In most of these series, the interiors of the houses, as well as the offices or workplaces represented (for example the editorial office of a daily newspaper in *Mesela Muzaffer*) are those of the middle classes: poorly furnished and to the taste of these classes. This atmosphere, which could seem stifling, is also highlighted by the tight shots, and takes on another meaning when articulated to the stories and characters: proximity and intimacy. But their choice translates another reality of this period: the reduced means of production in terms of budget and technologies and the lack of experienced professionals considering the particularities and needs of this new medium that is TV.

But one of the greatest novelties about series is the “de facto” birth of a sub-genre specific to the country, which in the following decades will be generic for new productions and will constitute for the audiences the somewhat nostalgic reference point about local series: the so-called “mahalle” series, otherwise known as neighborhood series. This is a genre that corresponds somewhat to dramedy and takes place in middle-class neighborhoods (Çetin 2016: 698) around stories of ordinary characters emphasizing the importance of neighborhood, family and community values<sup>9</sup>. It is the *Perihan Abla* series (*Sister Perihan*<sup>10</sup>, 1986) that is the precursor of this subgenre. Written by a play writer, Kandemir Konduk, who became in the 1990s one of the most important scriptwriters of TV series, *Sister Perihan* also promoted two actors, a woman and a man, to the main roles (Perran Kutman and Şevket Altuğ) who became, in the eyes of the audience, real TV stars, and in the following period, starred in other series which were also “unforgettable” for the audience: for example *Şehnaz Tango* and *Süper Baba (Super Dad)*, of which I will talk about.

When we consider these series as a whole, we see several explanatory elements of the socio-economic but also political conditions of their time. First and foremost, they reflect

9 For a detailed study of these series and in particular the relationship of the “mahalle” as a site, with the family and the community life of the middle classes, see Tanriöver 2003a; Uğur Tanriöver 2004.

10 In order to simplify in-text referencing of TV series, I only give the English title of the precursor series and of those that have official English titles. Also, only the date and the TV channel of the first season are provided because, from the 1990s on, the durations of the seasons are very variable and the popular TV series transfer from one channel to another frequently.

the lack of experience and professional competence and the limits of investment in TV production as such. This makes the series hybrid texts, mixtures of literature, theater and cinema, borrowing even some of their particularities from older forms of entertainment.

As for the genres, themes and narratives of these series, we see that producers and TRT offering to audiences, who had already become “PTT”, these “mahalle” (neighborhood) series, where the members of middle-class families can recognize themselves easily through the characters depicted as if they are just like neighbors and friends of the audience.

The “mahalle” series made the domestic withdrawal created by the atmosphere of the military regime tolerable by widening the universe of socialization of the spectators towards the diegesis of the series which are situated in districts and houses similar to theirs, with characters who resemble them. These series functioned to give them a safe virtual space and stories that exalt traditional family and community values, contributing to the restoration of social cohesion after the tormented years of civil war and military rule.

### 3. COMMERCIAL COMPETITIVITY OF TV BUSINESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TV SERIES: A PERIOD OF “TRIAL AND ERROR”

Certainly, the beginning of the 1990s was a particularly significant period, not only in Turkey but also internationally. To summarize, one can say that the cards were reshuffled all over the world, with the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the questioning of political bipolarization and the birth of new economic and political models due to globalization. While national borders were being redefined from a territorial point of view, from a socio-economic perspective, they tended to become blurred, in particular by the great role played by technological advances (even revolutions).

Despite the after-effects of the troubled period of chaos and military rule of the previous decade, the liberal policies of the elected government had concrete effects on the Turkish television sector. With the technical development of the network and the huge increase in the sales of television sets, the number of the audience also increased, and furthermore, with the introduction of audiometry by the AGB group in 1989, audiences could now be measured. All this fed another sector that was also developing in line with liberal policies: marketing communication and advertising.

The television series, already one of the favorite programs of the public, which replaced the practice of going to the cinema with the “magic box” at home, became a real issue following a great change in the audiovisual landscape. This was the foundation, first de facto, then regulated (Uğur Tanrıöver 2011b) of private TV channels breaking the monopoly of public TV and introducing the dimension of competition in content production. The new TV channels not only offered more choices, but also swept away censorship, which was argued to be necessary for public service, but in fact reflected the conservative policy that had weighed on TV until then.

It is from 1992 to 1993 that private channels started to buy and broadcast original series. The first productions (*Tatlı Betüş*, Show TV; *Şaban Askerde*, Star; *İki Kızkardeş*, Show TV) were quite similar to the popular ones broadcast by the public channel in the 1980s. Dramas and family comedies were written and directed by professional filmmakers, including “auteurs” such as Atıf Yılmaz (*Tatlı Betüş*) and Orhan Oğuz (*Şaban Askerde*) and were performed by major film stars such as the great Turkish film diva Türkan Şoray (*Tatlı Betüş*) and Kemal Sunal, known from the *Şaban* film series on which the *Şaban Askerde* series is based, or an actress-singer Gülben Ergen (*İki Kızkardeş*).

One series, *Mahallenin Muhtarları* (1992, Kanal 6) stood out from the rest, firstly by the fact that it was positioned in the sub-genre “neighborhood series”, but also in relation to its production team. It was conceived by the scriptwriter Kandemir Konduk who wrote *Sister Perihan* (TRT 2, 1986) which was very popular but the script itself was written by a group of six persons under the supervision of the scriptwriter. It was the first “scriptwriting team” of TV series crews. The series was directed by Filiz Kaynak, a female director, with a professional background in communication. She became the first professional director of television series in Turkey.

In the space of a few years, the number of TV series had increased steadily in line with the growth in the volume of programs of the new private channels, who were gradually seeing them as the main source of their advertising income. Because of the length of the episodes, relatively conventional at this period (from 35 to 60 minutes), some private channels like Star, ATV, SHOW TV could broadcast two series in prime time (Uğur Tanrıöver 2003b: 197-198). Also, producers (always in relation to audience measurements and the media planning requirements of advertising agencies) began to pay attention to the segmentation of series. Most of the productions kept this characteristic of being for “all audiences” and, in particular, the collective family audience, but they were starting to

produce series more specifically aimed at certain audiences: women, men, young people, children. Of course, in the absence of serious audience research and sophisticated ratings classifications, this segmentation is also rather “crafty” and operates more at the level of genres (detective for men, for example) or characters. For instance, *Çarli* (1998, Star), which features a chimpanzee as one of the characters, was aimed at children, and *Çılgın Bediş* (1996, Kanal D), which is an adaptation of the popular comic strip of the same name published in the weekly satirical magazine *Gırgır* on the adventures and generational conflicts of a high school girl, was for youth.

So, as producers and private channels began to compete fiercely to offer series, they mixed, combined, experimented with genres, themes and casting. In the sub-genre “neighborhood series”, several series were produced, some of which became cult over time: *Süper Baba* (ATV, 1993); *Ana Kuzusu* (1996, Show TV); *Babaevi* (1997, ATV); *İkinci Bahar* (1998, ATV). So much so that the public channel TRT1 also launched a neighborhood series (*Şaşıfelek Çıkmazı*, 1996) thus entering the competition game with private channels for the sharing of large advertising budgets.

One of the great novelties was the conception and broadcasting of series (often dramas or melodramas) that brought the great stars of cinema or music to the small screen, such as Türkan Şoray (*Gözlerinde Son Gece*, 1996, Star); Hülya Avşar (*Sevginin Gücü*, 1994, Show TV); Fatma Girik and Sibel Can (*Bize Ne Oldu*; 1999, TGRT); as well as music stars İbrahim Tatlıses (*Aşık Oldum*, 1992, Star), Ebru Gündeş (*Fırtınalar*, 1996, Star), Kenan Doğulu (*Hiç Bana Sordun Mu?*, 1996, Kanal D) and Muazzez Ersoy (*İntizar*, 1996, TGRT). While some stars continued their careers in television by taking part in other productions in the following years, the popularity of “star-studded series” as a wave did not last in the following years.

We know from different works on reception that in series, and especially in some genres like classical dramas (and in their soap-opera or telenovelas versions), female protagonists and how they are represented are important (Mumford 1995; Geraghty 1996; Modleski 2008). Conceived in rather traditional roles (even if their way of life was modern) these female characters (still in a rather timid way) have evolved since the 1990s<sup>11</sup>. Certainly, the representations themselves are not directly part of the problematic of this research, but

11 For early research on these representations in Turkish series, see Tanrıöver 2000 and 2003a.

I would like to give here an example of a series that stands out for its character and the events related to its broadcast.

*Şehnaz Tango* (1994, Show TV, Star) presents itself in its official announcement as a story of love and separation, but, conceived by a female screenwriter, the story evolves into the life (and struggles) of a middle-aged divorced woman (played by Perran Kutman known by the cult series *Sister Perihan*), mother of two young women, who experiences a relationship with a man and becomes pregnant by him. This is the first time that we see a relationship “out of wedlock” of a couple of adults and “good” characters on screen. Under the pretext of reactions and declining ratings, the series was suddenly stopped after four years of broadcasting. Women all over Turkey, including in small towns, held meetings and the telephone exchange of the channel was blocked by calls from protesting female spectators demanding the continuation of their favorite series<sup>12</sup>.

As I have already pointed out, the search for better targeted audiences pushed producers to make genre choices. Thus, action or police series, of which we have seen a few examples in the 1980s, would be part of the audiovisual landscape of this period. In 1998, *Deli Yürek* (Show TV) presented the adventures of a hero who is determined to expose the relations of the mafia with corrupt political circles. This series would also be among those that use actors who come neither from the cinema nor the theater. By choosing Kenan İmirzaloğlu, a man voted “best model of the world” in 1997, for the lead role, the producers were also paving the way for the launch and training of new actors and attracting not only male but also women audiences. The following year, a rival channel, Kanal D, started to broadcast *Yılan Hikayesi*, whose hero is a police commissioner played by a young theater actor, Memet Ali Alabora, called by some viewers the “Turkish Mel Gibson” and rivaling the handsome hero of *Deli Yürek*. In *Yılan Hikayesi*, too, the police struggle is mostly about dismantling a mafia gang alongside other crimes and against a backdrop of romantic stories. But the launch and popularity of these two action series must be analyzed in relation to the political context of the time. In fact, in 1996, a road accident in which three people were killed and one wounded broke into a scandal, implicating obscure relations between the police, the mafia and the political world. Known as the

“Susurluk car crash”<sup>13</sup>, this scandalous affair made the political context, which had already been very turbulent for several years, even more unstable and raised public awareness of the issues of corruption in political circles and serious incidents of police or paramilitary blunders under the pretext of the fight against terror against Kurdish separatists<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, the popularity of series, of which there were about 10 per week on the six channels that broadcast them in 1997<sup>15</sup>, was driving the production and broadcasting sectors, and the need for original content was pushing them to seek out and innovate not only in terms of series but also in terms of the production process. We can thus observe a clear trend towards the professionalization of the design and production professions. To give just a few examples, we can refer to scriptwriters or directors who specialize in creating TV series. Nuran Devres, the first anchorwoman of the public channel, with a background in English philology, wrote the script for 15 series during the 1990s. There are also several directors from universities’ film and television departments who shot a significant number of series during the same period (e.g. Türkan Derya, Taner Akvardar, Ömer Uğur, Veli Çelik). The professionalization also extended to technical teams: film technicians, who for the most part had no professional training, gave way to young people with film or television training. Since the university departments providing training in cinema and television were not founded until the 1970s and 1980s, the first graduates did not arrive on the film market until the end of the 1980s, and then, following the crisis in the film industry (and correlatively, the rise of television series) on the television market until the 1990s. The presence of these young professionals were felt much more clearly in the following period, when the human resources and media sectors even saw more graduates after the opening and growth in the number of private universities following the promotion of higher education as part of the Özal government’s policies (1984-1994).

12 <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/perran-ziyayi-secerdi-39002308>; [https://www.yeniasir.com.tr/yazarlar/seda\\_kaya\\_guler/2014/09/24/sehnaz-tango-ve-guner-namli](https://www.yeniasir.com.tr/yazarlar/seda_kaya_guler/2014/09/24/sehnaz-tango-ve-guner-namli), Accessed on 11.10.2022

13 <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/12/10/world/scandal-links-turkish-aides-to-deaths-drugs-and-terror.html>; for a comment on this case see the interview <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/crisis/104529-ergenekon-conspiracy-is-rooted-in-susurluk-says-former-minister> (Accessed on 12.10.2022)

14 Hundreds of civilians were reported missing, and many unsolved political crimes committed. These acts provoked the reaction of the “Saturday Mothers”: women in search of their loved ones, like the “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo” in Argentina, still active today, called “Saturday Peoples”.

15 We do not have official records or sources on quantitative data. This figure is obtained from research I conducted in 1997-1999 (Tanrıöver & Eyüboğlu 2000)

There was a huge growth in TV series productions during this era, but this was partly due to the fact that there were few series that lasted beyond one or two seasons. Shortly after most productions were “launched”, they were canceled, sometimes overnight, due to low audience ratings<sup>16</sup>. Presenting in general the filmic characteristics of the series of the 1980s (classic dramatic structure, linear narration, urban landscapes and middle-class interior settings, invisible editing, etc.), the new series gave priority to genres, subgenres and themes that have become classic, but also tried out new genres, new figures (characters and actors), new plots. The producers’ experimentation with various methods (Tanrıöver & Eyüboğlu 2000: 78-85) created instability and a climate of competition, strong on one hand, fragile on the other.

This instability was not unrelated to the social, economic and political realities of the country. Indeed, Turkey was also going through a period of oscillation between opening up to the world and integrating into the process of globalization on the one hand and trying to establish its political system and equip itself with public authorities in such a way as to take up these challenges on the other. These series, conceived in a fragile manner without adequate preparation and consideration of their feasibility, were eliminated to make room for others, and seemed to reflect the situation of the governments in power. From 1989 to 2002, there were 10 governments with 7 parties alternately in power, ranging from the extreme right to the social democratic left, with different coalition combinations and 6 prime ministers<sup>17</sup>. There was a certain willingness to open up the economy to the world, but also economic and political crises. The uncertainty and instability of the TV series was not only related to the direct and indirect effects of these economic crises on producers and broadcasters as on other social actors, but also as a reflection of political life as such. In the same way that governments were formed without a structural basis but for “conjunctural needs” and failed in a short time, TV series were also, for the most part, produced and distributed in a rather artisanal way without much planning or taking into account the needs of the market and the audience, and thus, ended up disappearing sometimes only after a few episodes.

16 We cannot detail here the working conditions in the production and broadcasting sector of series. But it should be noted that there are almost no contracts between producers and channels (and therefore between film crews) fixing the number of episodes, etc. For more details on the film industries in Turkey, see Uğur Tanrıöver 2011a.

17 Among a large literature in political science and economics about this period, see for example Cizre Sakaliloğlu and Yeldan 2000.

#### 4. THE MATURATION PERIOD OF THE TV SERIES: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PRODUCTION SECTOR AND THE FORMATION OF A TELEVISION CULTURE

Amidst aforementioned crises, the Turkish audience found refuge in TV series and began to forge a television culture. From the decoration of living rooms to the regulation of domestic life, for people, and especially for “housewives”<sup>18</sup>, the preferred target of advertisers, television occupied a central place (Tanrıöver 2003a; Uğur Tanrıöver 2003b), which I referred elsewhere as the “fifth wall” of the home (Uğur Tanrıöver 2013). The reflections of the severe economic crisis experienced on the eve of 2002, when Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power by gaining a majority in the parliament<sup>19</sup>, were also evident in all the TV content. Channels preferred lower-cost content shot in the studio, such as contests and talk shows, rather than high-budget productions. Thus, a new genre of series, the sit-com, appeared, which gave the possibility to satisfy the public, accustomed to family comedies, and constituted a solution for the decrease of production costs.

The remake of *The Jeffersons* (*Tatlı Hayat*, 2001, Show TV) and *The Nanny* (*Dadı*, 2001, Show TV); and then an original production talking about the daily life of a family, the quarrel between the husband who wants to be macho and the modern, active woman who is in fact dominant (*Çocuklar Duymasın*, 2002, TGRT), became very popular and would be, in a way, the pioneers of other productions of the same genre in the coming years. They also inspired the TV producers for mixed genres of comedy mixing the characteristics of classic family comedy, sit-com and absurd comedy, such as *Avrupa Yakası* (2004, ATV); *Yarım Elma* (2002, Kanal D) or *Saklambaç* (2005, ATV). As can be seen, this genre also attracted competition as each channel broadcast its own series of this genre.

The sit-com and its derivatives were not the only new popular genres of this period where actors were looking for new creative content (Öztürkmen 2018: 6). As soon as a certain restoration of economic equilibrium and a trend towards political stability appeared, from the years 2002-2004 onwards,

18 In terms of political correctness, it would be more appropriate to use “homemaker” instead of this term. However, in order to draw attention to the fact that this archaic term is still used in Turkey, especially in marketing communication and advertising, it is used here in quotation marks.

19 It should be noted that the AKP party gained the majority of the parliament in all elections since 2002 and is still in power making it the longest-lived government in the history of Turkey.



there was a kind of “series boom” on screens, a phenomenon probably never seen in countries comparable to Turkey (Çelenk 2010: 21). In this flourishing production setting, one finds practically all genres, including new and original sub-genres, and also themes not (or hardly) dealt with before. Filmic languages, protagonists and relationships were also highly diversified.

Among the great novelties of this period, let’s first note a sub-genre known as the “tribal series.” Set in the countryside of Anatolian provinces, in large estates where extended rich families (several generations) of powerful local notables live, with all the servants and workers of the farms and the house, they were in fact sagas, somewhat in the style of *Dallas*. Staging on the one hand the quasi-feudal relations and sometimes problematic traditions, such as the vendetta and polygamy, these series drew attention to the weight of the families of provincial notables, but also underlined the presence of young generations who oppose these traditions for a modernization of the ways of life and human relations. The first series in this tribal sub-genre, *Asmalı Konak (Vine Mansion, 2002, ATV)*, broke audience records, and thanks to the series, Turks have discovered the region of Cappadocia, which was until then almost completely ignored by domestic tourism<sup>20</sup>. TV series in this era served as a kind of documentary on the ignored or forgotten regions of the country through several productions such as *Zerda (2002, ATV)*, *Berivan (2002, Kanal D)*, *Kırık Ayna (2002, Kanal D)* or *Kınalı Kar (2002, Kanal D)*. As television studies have shown, filming locations are important in terms of audience identification with the series. Series set in their own city or region, familiar locations (just like local cultural practices, relationships, etc.) increase the interest of the audience in these productions. These series, in turn, have made local audiences more sensitive to the stories told and the problems addressed, as well as increasing their loyalty to the series. I would even argue that we can talk about the trans-regionalization of TV series because they convey the problems and socio-cultural structure of one region to the audience in another region, thus contributing to the development of interregional relations.

It was not only the hitherto invisible towns or villages that were brought to the screen but also, in some of these series, a whole identity that had been politically ignored or denied that began to be integrated into the diegesis: that of

the Kurds<sup>21</sup>. These were not obviously identity-based representations but rather references to cultural elements, often to criticize semi-feudal mores. Thus, not only in these series but also in melodramas, more and more of the main protagonists would have Kurdish first names such as Baran, Hevin, Berivan, even though the use of these names was officially prohibited at the time. I don’t want to establish a linear causality, but it can be said that these series have been (among other factors, of course) “agents of history”, in the same way as certain films (Ferro 1977: 106). Indeed, in 2003, the ban on Kurdish names was lifted by the government as part of Turkey’s European integration process.<sup>22</sup> A few years later, Turkish audiences heard short dialogues, songs and chants in Kurdish on TV screens for the first time (for example in *Sıla, 2006, ATV*).

Moreover, this interest in the countryside, and especially provincial regions of Anatolia can also be analyzed in relation to the great socio-political change of this period. The AKP party coming to power, which openly declared itself to support Islamic conservatism, also enhanced the value of conservative circles and local notables. The small and medium-sized enterprises (industrialists) in the provinces, called “Anatolian tigers” under Özal’s rule<sup>23</sup>, continued to be promoted and presented as models, not only in economic but also implicitly in social and cultural terms.

These first years of Erdoğan’s power were those in which many initiatives were taken to emphasize a hypothetical synthesis of Islam and modernism, such as the continuation of the European integration process and the establishment (or strengthening) of close relations with the Muslim countries of the Middle East and the Gulf. At the national level, this translated into a peaceful cohabitation of different ways of life and a certain recognition of identities. And the comfortable position of the AKP government at the international level made it possible, once the economic crisis has subsided, to move towards integration into the world economy.

A global look at the different series of this period shows us precisely these socio-cultural changes. Alongside sit-coms and new tribal series, the already popular genres were maintained with new blockbuster productions. Yet it is especially

20 Several studies have been done on the impact of these series on the promotion of filming regions. Cf. as an example Şahin et al. 2003.

21 Note that a series that aired in 1999 (*Aşkın Dağlarda Gezer, TGRT*) already dealt with the vendetta between two Kurdish tribes against the backdrop of love stories and the characters also had Kurdish first names.

22 “Kurdish name ban lifted by circular”, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kurtce-isim-yasagi-genelgeyle-kaldirildi-38499242>

23 There is a large literature, particularly in economics, on the subject of the “Anatolian tigers”. See for example, Demir et al. 2004.

at the level of the themes, characters and universes represented in these series that we witness the most significant changes.

The representation of different communities and identities, as well as that of the large Anatolian semi-feudal families in tribal series became important, offering viewers the opportunity to experience different ways of life and traditions. Among these were series set in the Black Sea region such as *Gülbeyaz* (2002, Kanal D) and *Fırtına* (2006, Kanal D) and those that depict the lives of the Roma (*Cennet Mahallesi*, 2004, Show TV; *Görgüsüzler*, 2008, ATV). Later, in 2010, the language and culture of Azerbaijan would also be represented in a comedy (*Yahşi Cazibe*, 2010, ATV).

It was also through a comedy (*Yabancı Damat*, 2004, Kanal D) that one of the biggest taboos of nationalist prejudices was shaken. The adventures of a mixed couple (a young Turkish woman and a young Greek man<sup>24</sup>) would make the “average Turkish” spectator discover their neighbors, long considered as the main enemies, because of ancient wars. This invitation to good neighborly relations with Greece cannot be considered as simply a new dramatic plot since Turkey was about to become an institutional partner with this neighboring country. Indeed it was in the same year, 2004, that the European Council decided to open membership talks with Turkey, and the Accession Negotiations opened on 3 October 2005<sup>25</sup>.

One of the great changes in the series can be observed in the characters of protagonists and in their relationships, especially in the dramas. We can certainly talk about changes for all types of protagonists, but to me, it seems more significant to underline those related to female heroes. Indeed, as already said above, the representations of women in television series had long been (and still have not entirely ceased to be) problematic. In the 2000s, several TV series were innovative in this area. Conceived much more as an independent “subject”, female characters were active in professional life, equipped with power in the family or simply masters of their life and choices. Single women, divorced women, etc. began to be visible in the series; and such vital issues as domestic violence, forced and early marriage of girls, submission to polygamy, etc. were integrated into the narratives of series such as *Gurbet Kadını* (2003, Show), *Aliye* (2004, ATV), *Omuz*

24 Let me note that there have been other fictions dealing with mixed marriages, in cinema or in series. But until then it was always a Turkish man marrying a “foreign” woman, certainly to conform to the radical Muslim belief that forbids Muslim women to marry a non-Muslim man. It is therefore a reversal of this stereotype.

25 <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/eu-and-turkeys-history-711>

*Omuz* (2004, Kanal D); *Binbir Gece* (2006, Kanal D). The fact that these series are almost all written or co-written by female writers or co-writers is certainly one of the determining factors of these changes.

However, this evolution can also be explained by important social and political facts. The women’s movement, which was already active during the second wave of feminism in the 1980s, and which includes a large number of organizations throughout the country, has been much more visible since the 1990s<sup>26</sup>. With the active participation of jurists who are part of this movement, two important legal reforms have been carried out: the new Civil Code concerning marriage and divorce rights, which established (despite some shortcomings) the equality of the couple (2002), and the revision of the Criminal Code, particularly concerning violence against women (2005).

The detective genre was also on the rise in this period. The series *Kurtlar Vadisi* (The Valley of Wolves), broadcast on Show TV with the slogan “it’s a mafia series”, from 2003, attracted a huge male audience and became, in a way, “the” series for men. It was based on the themes already dealt with in *Deli Yürek* and *Yılan Hikayesi*, a few years earlier, but exceeded them in popularity and broke audience records. Having been both controversial (especially for its ultra nationalist discourse and scenes of extreme violence) and popular<sup>27</sup>, and having also inspired three films of the same name, the series became somewhat a classic and continued with interruptions or name changes (*Kurtlar Vadisi Terör*<sup>28</sup>, 2007; *Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu*, 2007, Show TV) until 2016, changing channels five times. Other series of this new genre “mafia/deep state series” followed (*Şubat Soğuğu*, 2004, STV; *Sağır Oda*, 2006, Kanal D; *Kod Adı*, 2006, Kanal D) but without going beyond one season. Different versions, such as *Poyraz Karayel*<sup>29</sup> mixing elements of comedy (2015, Kanal D) or *Eşkiya Dünyaya Hükümdar Olmaz* (2015, ATV) made some ten years later prove the popularity of this subgenre. But other forms of

26 To give just a few examples of women’s activism in this period, we can recall the foundation of the first association for the fight against violence and shelters Mor Çatı in 1989; the creation of a library of women’s works in 1992; the foundation of two women’s film festivals (Flying Bloom, 1997 in Ankara and Filmmor, 2003).

27 For a publication on critical analyses of the series and the films derived from the series, see *İletişim Kuram ve Araştırma Dergisi* No. 22, 2006.

28 This version of the series was sanctioned for “increasing social tension and inciting violence” by the public authority and its broadcast was stopped after two episodes. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kurtlar-vadisi-teror-yayindan-kaldirildi-5962756>

29 For a detailed analysis of this series and its reception, see Öztelir 2018.

crime series were also produced such as *Karanlıkta Koşanlar* (2001, TRT) or *Hırsız Polis* (2005, Kanal D). A TV series with the characteristics of detective, comedy, and even some elements of drama, *Arka Sokaklar*, which was first broadcast in 2006 by Kanal D also became a sort of “classic”, since it still airs as of 2022.

In this period, television began to take a sustained and sometimes critical interest in history. *Kırık Kanatlar* (2006, Kanal D) and *Elveda Rumeli* (2007, ATV) brought the audience back to the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the liberation war of the early twentieth century, following the example of this category of productions of the public channel in the 1980s. But the main novelty is the launch of TV series “of memory” (Özen 2010). These are series that, through dramatic plots that focus on families or characters, propose a return to a history that is almost non-existent in school textbooks, practically ignored (not to say “buried”) by official history: *Çemberimde Gül Oya* (2004, Kanal D), *Hatırla Sevgili* (2006, ATV). Especially *Bu Kalp Seni Unutur Mu?*<sup>30</sup> (2009, Show TV) with scenes of police torture on the screen as a documentary, dealt with the troubled times of the country and especially with the military coup of 1980. These series were considered by the circles close to the conservative power as left-wing propaganda and “biased”. The public channel (always controlled by the political power) launched, several years later, a series on the same period but conceived in a “national” vision (i.e. nationalist and conservative) where there would also be a protagonist embodying the youth of Prime Minister Erdoğan: *Sevda Kuşun Kanadında* (2016, TRT), without much success. But this last series can also be analyzed in the context of the “politicization of series” and their instrumentalization by political power that we have observed from 2012 onwards.

It is impossible to detail all the changes or continuities observed in the series during this period when the volume of productions reached its peak. In addition to those mentioned in relation to the genres and subgenres, I will develop here only a few points that I consider essential. All the more so, as these also give us clues to the great success of Turkish series at the international level and their instrumentalization by political power in the following period, starting in the 2010s.

First, I will offer some details about the forms and processes of production and broadcasting. The biggest change in TV series occurred in the length of episodes. Episodes that ran between 25-35 minutes during the early days of television increased to 45-50 minutes in the 1990s. In the 2000s, the episodes became even longer ranging from 90 to 120 minutes, sometimes even longer meant that all the “prime time” of the channels that broadcast them were devoted to TV series.

The professionalization of the production and management teams continued in parallel with the considerable number of new departments at universities and specialized schools of higher education. Even though there are still some film directors or writers who work for television, the series have had, from this time on, professional scriptwriters, directors, editors, etc. specialized on TV. This also explains the presence of more women and young people influencing the new themes and forms, as in the film industry (Uğur Tanrıöver 2017).

The impact of these new teams on the aesthetics of productions is impressive. There are clear technical improvements (supported also by technological advances and digitization) but also processes of filming, editing and narration are now similar, for some, to those of art house cinema. The simple and linear narration gives way more to alternate narratives, flash backs, even the anachronistic narrative; shooting angles, alternations of shots usually targeted at cinephiles are offered to TV viewers. This evolution has also to be related to the changes in the sector at the international level (Akınerdem and Sirman 2018: 6). Great changes also exist in the diegesis, the narrative universes of the series of this period (Danacı Yüce & Güvenli 2013). On the one hand, tribal or regional series (such as those of the Black Sea in particular) reflected provincial life, against a backdrop of spectacular landscapes and show, in a tone that is moreover auto-orientalist, the mores and traditions of these less developed regions. On the other hand, some series that took place in Istanbul no longer reflected mosques and ancient streets, but instead large buildings in ultra-modern neighborhoods offering quite different landscapes: skyscrapers, very well-designed offices where meetings of wealthy executives and bosses are held, with dresses and suits of haute couture. Families live in luxury villas with pools and gardens, drive branded cars; and the famous middle-class family dinners or modest lovers’ tea parties are transferred to fusion food restaurants or chic cafes. Tea, the traditional drink, is replaced by cappuccinos and flavored coffees; the small glass of Turkish tea gives way to Starbucks cups in the hands of students or young work-

30 The production of the series was interrupted after 17 episodes, although the project was intended to cover the whole of recent history until the AKP took power. The reason officially announced was economic (declining ratings and funding difficulties), but the producer had doubts about the reliability of the audience measurement. <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/120400-bu-kalp-seni-unutur-mu-yayindan-kaldirildi>

ers who “run” in the streets of rich neighborhoods or on the campuses of modern<sup>31</sup> private universities. So we can already speak of a kind of “New Yorkization” or “Dubaization” of the urban landscape.

Related to this change in diegesis and narratives, the cast of the series was also transformed. The physique of the actors changes radically. If we look only at the very popular series of this period, we can say that the Turks are, in majority, very tall, slim, with a photo-model look, blond, with blue or green eyes, with babies and children who are also blond. Gone are the protagonists that were so familiar to the fans of the 1980s neighborhood series, the chubby, dark-haired women, the short, not-so-muscular men and the brown-eyed children who made identification and familiarity easy. The new figures are therefore not identifiable but to be taken as models. Their clothes and accessories are also admired by the audience, especially women, who carefully follow the names of the series’ sponsors to acquire the same (Uğur Tanrıöver 2011a).

These two changes (of the urban landscape and of the cast) reflect the actual transformations experienced and the economic and social policies adopted during these years. The opening of Turkey to global markets has allowed the penetration of chains such as Starbucks, Ikea or Mango in the country; and in a country with a very young population, they have found in the big cities a clientele open to novelties (Uğur Tanrıöver & Kara 2019). Moreover, under the Erdoğan government, the priority given to urban construction investments<sup>32</sup>, the rapid opening and increasing number of large and busy shopping malls have, in fact, also transformed urban landscapes and daily practices.

## 5. SEEN AS A MEANS OF “SOFT POWER” BUT SUBJECT TO “HARD CONTROL”<sup>33</sup>: TRANSNATIONALIZED AND POLITICIZED SERIES FACING A FRAGMENTED AUDIENCE

One of the phenomena that marked Turkish series the most from 2006-2007 onwards was their opening up to the world: their export, first to Arab and Muslim countries, then to practically every corner of the globe. The popularity of Turkish

series, especially in Muslim countries, but just as much in Greece<sup>34</sup> and other countries, would not be a simple economic fact among others but would figure in the economic and international policy of the political power itself. The Ministry of State for Foreign Trade declared the film and TV series production sector a “strategic sector” to be encouraged by the public power in 2010 (Uğur Tanrıöver 2011a). The popularity of Turkish series accompanied the rise in popularity of Erdoğan’s image internationally, especially among Muslim countries, and also due to the presence of Foreign Ministers Ali Babacan (2007-2009) and Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009-2011)<sup>35</sup>, leading the political and academic circles to think there was a relationship between TV exports and Turkey’s “soft power” or cultural diplomacy.

When Turkish TV series were introduced to international markets,<sup>36</sup> they were first preferred because of their very low, and therefore, competitive prices. This changed as the series gained in popularity internationally. Recent reception studies conducted among Turkish TV series audiences in various countries reveal that the reasons for appreciation of these series are linked to the changes I have highlighted earlier. Some of these include technical and aesthetic aspects, such as their widely popular quality original music. Another is their discursive and narrative features. Modern lifestyles and respect for certain traditions and institutions (especially the family), and the presence of strong and relatively independent female characters are the most emphasized aspects, especially in Muslim countries<sup>37</sup>. Supported by this success, producers are starting to produce new series in new genres and themes, without giving up on more classic genres and forms, such as *Gümüş* (2005, Kanal D) broadcast under the name of *Noor* that became phenomenal in Arab countries.

From the 2010s onwards, the most significant changes include the more obvious introduction of social and political issues and demands, the visibility of new identities and a different aspect of urban landscapes. In 2010, the first epi-

31 This aspiration to modern life and to be part of the intellectual elites was the theme of a sit-com (*Avrupa Yakası*, 2004, ATV)

32 For a dossier on these policies analyzed in different disciplines, see <https://birikimdergisi.com/dergiler/birikim/1/sayi-270-ekim-2011-sayi-270-ekim-2011/2444>

33 These terms (soft power, hard control) are borrowed from Vitrinel 2019b.

34 For a detailed analysis of the presence and reception of these series in Greece cf. Larochelle 2021.

35 Both of these politicians later left Erdoğan’s party to found new political parties, in 2019 and 2020, respectively, positioned in the opposition.

36 An important initiative also comes from TRT which launched new channels in different regional languages, especially in Kurdish, Arabic and the languages of Central Asian countries, familiarizing the audiences of these countries with Turkey through all kinds of programs.

37 For a documentary on the impact of these series on female audiences, cf. *Kismet. How Turkish Soap Operas Changed the World*, Nina Maria Pashalidou, 2013: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX8Un4nneXg&ab\\_channel=AljazeeraEnglish](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NX8Un4nneXg&ab_channel=AljazeeraEnglish)

sode of a series of the melodrama genre, adapted from the novel and film of the same name, made the news. Openly featuring a gang rape, *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?* (Kanal D), at first controversial, later became very popular. It drew public attention to rape and its prosecution, but also to the importance of solidarity between women and organizations fighting for women's rights. In the same year, the series *Behzat Ç. Bir Ankara Polisiyesi* (Star) was broadcast. As its name suggests, it is a police series that highlights the city where the story takes place: Ankara. This was a kind of revenge against all the melodramas that take place in Istanbul and the series that promote different regions, while the capital is invisible in the world of series. *Behzat Ç.* is a pioneer on several levels. First, it raises such crucial issues as the right to practice one's mother tongue, violence against trans people, etc. in every episode. Through the main protagonist, *Behzat Ç.*, who is in fact a kind of anti-hero (and the other police protagonists who are also conceived in a similar way) and the general atmosphere with a film noir aesthetic, the series displays a critical tone towards the racist, sexist, etc. mentality of the police, through police plots and adventures and the fight against the mafia. But among its most important features worth noting here is the presence of a lesbian protagonist (Banu) for the first time in the history of Turkish series. Her sexual orientation was represented as neither an insinuation or innuendo, nor a caricatured figure, as has been the case with some gay characters in films and series.

In the path opened by *Behzat Ç.*, other adventure series would stage the dark streets, the poor and dangerous neighborhoods, in short, the chaotic face of the big city. In 2012, *Kayıp Şehir* (Kanal D) featured the first trans person, not as a representation but as a real presence, to the sector and to the screen through the role of Duygu, played by trans actress Ayta Sözeri. In *Ulan İstanbul* (2014, Kanal D), there was to be a protagonist, somewhat secondary, gay. And finally, *Çukur*<sup>38</sup> (2017, Show) took up and developed these socio-political themes, adding new ones such as incest, with protagonists of different sexual orientations or identities, such as sex workers, Kurds, illegal immigrants, etc.

These critical stances of some series for more equality and rights are not unrelated to political and social developments. If *Behzat Ç.* seems to anticipate certain developments such as a growing civil society as a result of demands made by political actors and NGOs, the other aforementioned series

were produced and broadcast at the time when Turkey signed (as the first country to do so) the Istanbul Convention<sup>39</sup> in 2011, and when the government launched the initiatives called "peace process" with the armed Kurdish groups of PKK, considered a terror organization, in 2014, with the goal of resolving ethnic division and violence.

One of the series that has somehow shaken up the landscape of the sector and especially contributed to the development of new relationships between producers/broadcasters and the political world<sup>40</sup> is *Muhteşem Yüzyıl (Magnificent Century)*, Show TV, 2011). This period drama which depicts the 16th century palace life of Sultan Suleiman, known as Suleiman the Magnificent in the West for his extending the Ottoman Empire to its greatest reach, was focused more on the story of his favorite wife Hürrem, her love for the Sultan, and the various intrigues of power in the Palace. The series, which broke audience records, was strongly criticized by the then prime minister Erdoğan, who, in 2014, accused it of falsifying history and not talking about the military victories of the Sultan. He added "we have warned the producers of this series and are also waiting for the judges to do what is necessary"<sup>41</sup>. This reaction was in fact, as imminent research works point out (Vitrinel 2019b; Ildır 2022) a direct response to the political stance of some of its actors (but also others) on the side of the Gezi Park protesters, a social revolt, severely repressed by the government. Despite excellent ratings, *The Magnificent Century* stopped being broadcast. Already in 2013, the popular absurdist comedy of the public channel TRT, *Leyla ile Mecnun*<sup>42</sup> (2011), was also canceled for the same undeclared reason. This was the historical moment when the political power openly declares its will to control and thus directly politicize<sup>43</sup> the series. Also, and in reaction, some view-

39 Known as the Istanbul Convention, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, is a human rights treaty aimed at protecting the victims of gender-based violence and ending the impunity of the perpetrators of violence.

40 As I stated in the introduction about the limitations of this article, I cannot make an in-depth analysis of the production and broadcasting sector. There are several publications that report on the changing ownership structures of media groups and TV channels since Erdoğan's party came to power and on the relations of these groups with political power. Cf. for example, Sözeri and Güney 2011 for an overview or Çetin 2014 on the politicization of the series.

41 <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-erdogandan-muhtesem-yuzyila-agir-elistiri-22009998>

42 This series also criticized in a satirical way the ban on showing alcoholic beverages on TV, replacing glasses of wine with bunches of grapes.

43 For a study developing this aspect of politicization cf. Emre Çetin (2014).

38 For an in-depth analysis of this series, which details the elements I quote, cf. Emre Çetin 2016.

ers chose to watch the series most criticized by Erdoğan, as a proof of political opposition.

At the behest of the government, several series recounting the founding of the Ottoman Empire or the reign of important sultans began to be produced and broadcast on the public channel TRT (*Diriliş Ertuğrul*, 2014; *Payitaht Abdülhamit*, 2017) or the pro-government channel ATV (*Kuruluş Osman*, 2019). As academic studies on these series point out<sup>44</sup>, Erdoğan and his party aim to “construct” an alternative history that glorifies the Ottoman past instead of the dominant historical narrative since the foundation of the republic in 1923. These initiatives also came after a radical change in audience measurements. The public television left the system of audiometry provided by Nielsen AGB to make its own measurements. The task then was entrusted to a new institution in 2012, which had an impact on the reliability and stability of the TV industry, especially for producers (Ildir and Çelik Rappas 2021: 258).

The consideration of television series as a means of direct propaganda, in the manner of Soviet propaganda cinema, would have, as another consequence, the arrival on the screens of a new genre which can be described as “special operation” or “anti-terror” series. Certainly, as I have already pointed out, action series recounting the struggle of heroes against foreign spies or Kurdish separatists based on often ultra-nationalist discourses (sometimes going as far as racism) have already existed, but they didn’t reach a wide audience (*Tek Türkiye*, 2007 and *Şefkat Tepe*<sup>45</sup>, 2010, STV; *Sakarya Fırat*, 2009, Kanal 7; *Önce Vatan*, Show TV, 2010). As of 2017, there was a sort of screen invasion by these special operation or anti-terror series: *İsimsizler*, 2017, Kanal D; *Söz*, 2017, Star TV; *Savaşçı*, 2017, Fox, *Börü*, 2018, Star and *Teşkilat*, 2021, TRT (its second season is currently airing). Taking advantage of the direct support of the government, especially regarding the loan of equipment or access to military areas, but also through marketing communication strategies (President Erdoğan’s visit to the set, etc.) these TV series portrayed the heroism of Turkish soldiers and secret agents fighting terrorists or “foreign” forces plotting on the future of the country according to various conspiracy theories. As can be seen, the launch of

these series was directly related to the political situation and position of the country. They serve both to legitimize Turkey’s military engagement in Syria since 2015 and to consolidate Erdoğan’s power which has been weakened after the 2016 failed coup d’état. Consequently, these series’ narratives are intended to glorify the image of military heroism and the already present discourse of martyrdom in Muslim culture. When one considers that military service is compulsory for men (conscientious objection is forbidden and sanctioned) in Turkey and that unemployment, especially among young people, is high around 20% officially but estimated much higher by economists, these TV series function like the famous advertisement of the American army during the First World War, where in this case the message would be: “I want you for Turkish Army!” but also “I want you to approve of my national and international policy and to support my government”.

Towards the end of the 2010s, other factors also brought important changes to Turkish series, such as the arrival of digital platforms on the market, since 2016. Turkish viewers, already accustomed to watching series online, especially due to the widespread practice of piracy, found new media (Ildir and Çelik Rappas 2021) and new series there. These media were also, at least initially, a way to escape the increasingly strict censorship applied to the TV channels under the control of the Supreme Council of Radio television (RTÜK). However, the political power ended up extending the media censorship to digital webcasts (Ildir and Çelik Rappas 2021: 257). TV series that are subject to more diverse competition on platforms like Netflix tend to be more creative and less conventional in their ability to offer new themes and narratives to large transnational audiences of the platforms. Thus, we see, for the first time, a series whose main character is, for example, a Jewish woman from Turkey (*The Club*, Netflix, 2019) or a headscarf-wearing housekeeper<sup>46</sup> (*Ethos*, Netflix, 2020). I must point out, however, that the number of subscribers to these transnational platforms is still quite limited (3.5 million for Netflix and 2 million for Disney+) compared to the country’s total audience estimated at over 58 million viewers<sup>47</sup>. And above all, it is a different demographic compared to Turkish series fans of network TV channels.

Faced with competition from digital platforms, network television channels too are developing new forms and themes

44 There is abundant literature in this area. See for example Çevik 2019; Özçetin 2019; Tinas 2020; Tua 2021.

45 The pro-government press said that the 2016 coup d’état unleashed by the Gülen community (known as FETÖ, Fetullahist Terror Organization since this date) had been prepared through coded messages in these TV series (and others not cited here) broadcast on the semi-official channel of this community and banned since. <https://www.yenisafak.com/bilgi/feto-halki-dizileriyle-isledi-2764294>

46 Both in popular Turkish cinema and TV series, there have been headscarved cleaning women characters before. However, *Ethos* is the first series in which such a character is the “main protagonist” while preserving her fundamental qualities.

47 <https://tiak.com.tr/evren-degerleri>

of series, such as the “couch” series (*Doğduğun Ev Kaderindir*, 2019, TV 8; *Kırmızı Oda*, 2020, TV 8 *Camdaki Kız*, 2021, Kanal D) all adapted from the books of psychoanalyst Budaycıoğlu, making psychotherapy, which still not widely practiced in the country, popular. Korean or American adaptations of already popular genres and forms, such as melodramas or even family comedies, continue their way through new productions to more traditional audiences on TV channels but are also included in digital platforms to “attract new audiences.”

In these new productions, there are also many changes correlated with the evolution of social life and the mentalities of the public, despite (and sometimes against) the hardening of the conservatism of the power. One no longer needs to be married to experience romantic (or sexual) relationships, women are active in all sectors of professional life; domestic violence, sexual harassment is strongly denounced, especially since Turkey exited from the Istanbul Convention by Erdoğan’s presidential decree in 2021. As love stories, family affairs, and police and mafia intrigues unfold, the demand for rights and social and legal justice (Akinerdem and Sirman 2018) in a general sense is being heard.

## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

Taking advantage of the great success of Turkish cinema with audiences, especially families, Turkish TV series have become the most appreciated television content in a short amount of time. By illustrating the relationship between television content and the cultural, social and political context of its creation through periodization, in this paper I presented an introductory analysis to the social history of Turkey through television series. The changes that these series have undergone during almost fifty years of their existence are strongly correlated with social transformations, political stances or the state of development of the production and broadcasting sector, which itself is a function of economic and political relations.

Thus, the priorities in the forms, contents and genres of the series show us that in the first years of television broadcasting, these productions translated the will to assure the social cohesion and a certain national unity around common values of the middle classes. The sector lacked professionals while the broadcasting monopoly and the economic crisis also prevented any impulse in this field.

Since the 1990s, with the transition to a hybrid regime and the arrival of private channels on the market, TV series,

the industry’s main competitive asset, began their ascent up the diversity ladder. The production sector has become more professional which resulted in better quality productions although the sector is still struggling. Without established contracts, without reliable commitments, series were produced somewhat “on trial.” The result was a high turnover, without many productions lacking longevity.

It was following the change of power, with in particular, relatively liberal political promises and the will of integration to the world economy in the 2000s, that the series would live their period of maturation and foundation. More diversified, playing on different genres, improving their technical and aesthetic quality, they became “the” common cultural practice at the national level and infiltrated into the international markets.

From the 2010s onwards, we can observe a politicization of the series, which translated a propagandist will of the government to instrumentalize them in the consolidation of the conservative, nationalist and Islamic (and even Islamist) power in place. However, the government’s attempt to increase its partisan base and further spread its ideology through such series on pro-governmental channels does not seem to have succeeded as planned. This is because the proliferation of platforms broadcasting TV series, especially the competition created by the introduction of digital platforms, has resulted in a fragmentation of TV series (and their audiences): the propagandist ideological series and those that aim to tell a story, not to teach a lesson to the audience.

On the one hand, there is a more conservative and traditional audience that admires glamorous melodramas, classic family comedies or epic productions of ancient or current heroes/warriors broadcast on the network channels and available thereafter on the websites of these channels. On the other hand, there is an audience with modern inter- or transnational lifestyles, who also consume TV series from different countries, prefer watching less conventional Turkish series, and are more open to the new cultures and ideas presented via new media. Some of the audience, who are subscribers to transnational platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ or even Turkish ones (BluTV, Exxen) look for more quality and more “high level” productions, and criticize the “regional” content of these platforms. To such an extent that we should perhaps now speak more of a fracture than a fragmentation of the audience; a fracture that corresponds to an increasingly polarized population exasperated by the authoritarian tendency of Erdoğan’s new presidential regime.

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## TV Series

- Aliye (2004-2006)
- Ana Kuzusu (1996)
- Arka Sokaklar (Back Streets) (2006-2022)
- Asmalı Konak (Vine Mansion) (2002-2003)
- Aşk-ı Memnu (Forbidden Love) (1975), Remake (2008-2010)
- Aşkın Dağlarda Gezer (1999)
- Aşık Oldum (1992)
- Ateşten Günler (1987)
- Avrupa Yakası (2004-2009)
- Babaevi (Dad's House) (1997-2001)
- Behzat Ç. Bir Ankara Polisiyesi (2010-2013, 2019)
- Binbir Gece (1001 Nights) (2006-2009)
- Berivan (2002)
- Bize Ne Oldu (1999)
- Bu Kalp Seni Unutur Mu? (2009-2010)
- Börü (2018)
- Camdaki Kız (2021-)
- Cennet Mahallesi (2004-2007)
- Çalikuşu (1986)
- Çarli (1998)
- Çemberimde Gül Oya (2004-2005)
- Çılgın Bediş (1996-2001)
- Çocuklar Duymasın (2002-2005, 2010-2014, 2017-2019)
- Çukur (The Pit) (2017-2021)
- Dadı (Nanny) (2001-2002)
- Deli Yürek (Crazy Heart) (1998-2002)
- Diriliş Ertuğrul (Resurrection: Ertuğrul) (2014-2019)
- Doğduğun Ev Kaderindir (2019-2021)
- Elveda Rumeli (2007-2009)
- Eşkiya Dünyaya Hükümdar Olmaz (2015-2021)
- Ethos (Bir Başkadır) (2020)
- Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne? (Fatmagul) (2010-2012)
- Fırtına (2006-2007)
- Fırtınalar (1996-1998)
- Görgüsüzler (2008)
- Gözlerinde Son Gece (1996-1997)

- Gurbet Kadını* (2003-2005)  
*Gülbeyaz* (2002-2003)  
*Gümüş* (Noor) (2005-2007)  
*Hanımın Çiftliği* (1990), *Remake* (2009-2011)  
*Hatırla Sevgili* (2006-2008)  
*Hırsız Polis* (2005-2007)  
*Hiç Bana Sordun Mu?* (1996)  
*İki Kızkardeş* (1993)  
*İkinci Bahar* (1998-2001)  
*İntizar* (1997)  
*İsimsizler* (2017)  
*Karanlıkta Koşanlar* (2001)  
*Kartallar Yüksek Uçar* (1984)  
*Kavanozdaki Adam* (1987)  
*Kayıp Şehir* (*Lost City*) (2012-2013)  
*Kaynanalar* (1974-2005)  
*Kıvalı Kar* (2002-2004)  
*Kırık Ayna* (2002-2003)  
*Kırık Kanatlar* (2006-2007)  
*Kırmızı Oda* (*Red Room*) (2020-2022)  
*Kurtlar Vadisi* (*The Valley of Wolves*) (2003-2005)  
*Kurtlar Vadisi Terör* (*The Valley of Wolves: Terror*) (2007)  
*Kurtlar Vadisi Pusu* (*The Valley of Wolves: Ambush*) (2007-2016)  
*Kuruluş Osmancık* (1988)  
*Kuruluş Osman* (*Establishment/The founder: Osman*) (2019-)  
*Kuruntu Ailesi* (1985-1990)  
*Küçük Ağa* (1984)  
*Kod Adı* (2006)  
*Leyla ile Mecnun* (2011-2013, 2021-)  
*Mesela Muzaffer* (1987)  
*Mahallenin Muhtarları* (*Head People of the Neighborhood*) (1992-2002)  
*Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (*The Magnificent Century*) (2011-2014)  
*Omuz Omuza* (2004-2005)  
*Önce Vatan* (2010)  
*Payitaht Abdülhamit* (*The Capital: Abdul Hamid*) (2017-2021)  
*Perihan Abla* (*Sister Perihan*) (1986-1988)  
*Poyraz Karayel* (2015-2017)  
*Sağır Oda* (2006-2007)  
*Sakarya Fırat* (2009-2013)  
*Saklambaç* (2005)  
*Samanyolu* (1989)  
*Savaşçı* (*Warrior*) (2017-2021)  
*Sevda Kuşun Kanadında* (*On the Wings of Love*) (2016-2017)  
*Sevginin Gücü* (1994)  
*Sıla* (2006-2008)  
*Söz* (2017-2019)  
*Süper Baba* (*Super Dad*) (1993-1997)  
*Şaban Askerde* (1993-1994)  
*Şaşıfelek Çıkmazı* (1996-1998)  
*Şefkat Tepe* (2010-2014)  
*Şehnaz Tango* (1994-1997)  
*Şubat Soğuğu* (2004-2006)  
*Tatlı Betüş* (1993)  
*Tatlı Hayat* (2001-2004)  
*Tek Türkiye* (2007-2011)  
*Teşkilat* (*The Shadow Team*) (2021-)  
*The Club* (*Kulüp*) (2021-)  
*Uğurlugiller* (1988-1991)  
*Ulan İstanbul* (2014-2015)  
*Uzaylı Zekiye* (1988)  
*Yabancı Damat* (*The Foreign Groom*) (2004-2007)  
*Yahşi Cazibe* (2010-2012)  
*Yaprak Dökümü* (*The Fall of Leaves*) (2006-2010)  
*Yarım Elma* (2002-2003)  
*Yılan Hikayesi* (1999-2002)  
*Zerda* (2002-2004)

# AT THE EDGE OF A NEW COGNITIVE MAPPING: ETHOS (BİR BAŞKADIR)

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## KEYWORDS

Ethos; cinematic mapping; nostalgia; hybrid narrative; digital platforms.

## ABSTRACT

The fact that the digital platforms in Turkey are a decisive force in content production (film and TV series) has enabled the production of freer and more creative content in several creative fields such as screenplay, narrative language, cinematography, costume/set design and acting in the context of TV series. The rules and pressures of the Turkish state agency RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme

Council) and the executives of traditional television channels have caused a tendency towards digital platforms in the audience. This article focuses on the Netflix series *Ethos* (Turkish title: *Bir Başkadır*), which aired in 2020. Within the framework of the concepts of nostalgia and cinematic mapping, the article aims to analyze *Ethos*' political plane, references, characters, and the social class/identity and lifestyles that the series gives voice to. While analyzing the hybrid narrative of the series, this paper attempts to reveal the cinematic mapping along with the characters, spatial representations and values that express them, and will discuss how the concept of nostalgia works and functions as a tool providing such mapping. In this context, we read *Ethos* as a call for confrontation for the new cognitive map, especially at a time when the desire of people to coexist has been seriously damaged due to polarization between them as a result of the government strategies and belligerent policies of the last two decades. The series employs a nostalgic gaze through a hybrid narrative to construct the vanishing present.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the TV series produced for digital platforms in Turkey have gained a significant importance. The widespread acceptance of digital platform mobility is considered the result, not only of technological factors, but also cultural changes (Tryon 2013). In this respect, digital platforms are a new global economic power operating both in distribution and production as a global actor (Lobato 2019). It can be argued that all the production and screening problems of the TV series sector in Turkey have seen progress in a positive way through this new economic power. Digital platforms have become a new production area for the creative workers of the cinema and TV series industry. Significant progress has been made in certain creative areas, such as screenplay, narrative language, cinematography, costume/set design and acting in the TV series made for these platforms. Digital platforms have also become a refuge for industry professionals and audiences who have grown tired of the pressure exerted by Radio and Television Supreme Council<sup>1</sup> (RTÜK) and the executives of traditional television channels. Unlike the series produced for television that lasted for years, elaborate productions with relatively different and freer content with less episodes, where the narrative was not extended to fill the airing hours, have enabled the middle-upper class audience in Turkey to use digital platforms (Gül 2020; Kaptan and Algan 2020). However, despite positive developments in the production area, Netflix removed access to an episode of the series *Designated Survivor* and canceled the series project *If Only* (*Şimdiki Aklım Olsaydı*) in Turkey due to the demands of RTÜK. This situation has been evaluated as censorship due to depiction of LGBTQ characters (Yücel 2020) and has increased the concern that productions on digital platforms may also be restricted.

One of the obvious trends in the TV series made for digital platforms such as Netflix and BluTV<sup>2</sup> is the focus on productions with a period atmosphere. For example, *Yeşilçam*<sup>3</sup> (2021), directed by Çağan Irmak, has a meta-narrative regarding the inner workings of the film industry in Turkey in the 1960s that deals with the relationship between producers

and politics. The series *The Club* (*Kulüp*) (2021), directed by Zeynep Günay Tan (a number of its episodes are directed by Seren Yüce), focuses on the entertainment life of 1950s Istanbul and tells of a Jewish family whose story starts before the events of September 6-7<sup>4</sup>. *Ethos*, the 8-episode Netflix production made in 2020 and directed by Berkun Oya, focuses on Turkey's recent past. The series, which was screened at a time when everyone was locked in their homes due to the pandemic in Turkey, has been widely criticized because it deals with social breaking points and controversial subjects such as secularism, conservatism and ethnic identity in Turkey. Online academic meetings have also been held regarding this series.

Within the framework of the concepts of nostalgia and cinematic mapping, this article aims to analyze *Ethos*' political plane, references, characters, and also the social segments that the series gives voice to. The article will also analyze the characters through cinematic mapping using the values and the spatial representations expressing them. It will discuss how the concept of nostalgia works and functions as a tool that enables such mapping. Taking influence from Jameson, the concept of "cinematic mapping" proposed by Kellner (2010) as a mapping to represent historical/social events, individuals, character types, cultural norms and other defining features of a particular society can be an explanatory tool to comprehend both the series and the historical and cultural references on which it is based. We suggest that the concept of nostalgia can be seen as an element that connects social segments which are not in contact with each other in the series and which completes the cinematic map. The series includes many nostalgic elements: The Turkish title *Bir Başkadır* references the song "Bir Başkadır Benim Memleketim" ("My Unique Country"), which is familiar to almost all members of Generation X in Turkey; the music (pop-arabesque) of Ferdi Özyeğin in the credits; references to the 1970s cinema in its narrative aesthetics; and finally, the visual texture of the entire series. In this context, this article examines the visual/cinematic nostalgic tools of the bond that establishes itself between different social segments through cinematic mapping. In the article, the relationship between cinematic mapping and nostalgia will be established through visual codes and music.

1 Public institution that regulates and supervises radio and television broadcasting in Turkey.

2 Blu TV is Turkey's first local digital platform, established in 2015.

3 *Yeşilçam*, which is the name of the street where the offices of film companies were located in Istanbul before 1980, also refers to a production model and film style in the period of Turkish cinema when a lot of films were made.

4 The events of September 6/7 are the most severe attack in the history of the Republic against Christian and Jewish citizens of the Republic of Turkey living in Istanbul in 1955. These attacks, which caused great loss of property and life, were seen as the elimination of minorities from the demographic and economic structure (Güven 2011).

Many films and TV series that deal with the historical/social past in Turkey were also made before digital platforms. These productions used the past as a backdrop to create an atmosphere of a period or they confronted the past. During the period (1974-1975) when İsmail Cem was the general manager of the state-owned TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation), this adventure started with the adaptation of works from Turkish literature made by Halit Refiğ, Metin Erksan and Lütfi Akad, prominent filmmakers of Turkish cinema. Starting with the 1974 adaptation of *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*The Forbidden Love*), directed by Halit Refiğ, and continued until the 1990s, many TV series of TRT became a field of confrontation due to the cultural policies and perspectives that changed with new governments. One of the most concrete and bitter examples of this is that the original 35 mm copies of Halit Refiğ's TV series *Yorgun Savaşçı* (*The Tired Warrior*), adapted from Kemal Tahir's novel, which were burned by the state even though the production was made by TRT (Duruel 2006). During the 1980s and 1990s, the TV series and literary adaptations dealing with the recent history of Turkey formed indispensable sources of Turkish television productions. Since the 2000s, Turkish TV series have found considerable interest from the foreign market, and they have become an important export item.

It is a common approach in Turkey to critically evaluate TV series as products of popular culture. For example, Kahraman (2007) states that it is difficult to make technical and structural innovations in TV series. They appeal to a middle-class mentality, and therefore they exhibit a structure that is easy to follow and not open to experimentation, which adheres to traditional, average and common morality. Although such productions are common on television and the criticisms have some justification, one can observe that different productions also find their place on television. Due to the bond that television dramas establish with large audiences, it is important to increase the number of TV series and popular productions that deal with social problems. The way these TV series approach social problems and historical events have been evaluated with different perspectives in Turkey. Using the TV series *My Heart Won't Forget You* (*Bu Kalp Seni Unutur Mu?*) as an example, Çelenk (2010) states that television, as a memory space, contributes to the strengthening of social memory, and draws attention to the possibilities it offers to confront the past. Emre Çetin (2014) focuses on the transformation of the TV series in Turkey in a politicized media environment, and through the TV series *Valley of the Wolves* (*Kurtlar Vadisi*, 2003–2005) and *Magnificent Century*,

*Once upon a Time Ottoman: Rebellion* (*Bir Zamanlar Osmanlı: Kiyam*) she emphasizes that politicization has become dominant and that the less powerful side is silenced by pressures and interventions. However, he also states that due to such politicization, the TV series which deal with social problems like *My Heart Won't Forget You*, *Behzat Ç.* (2010-2013) and *Lost City* (*Kayıp Şehir*, 2012-2013) have critical understandings of various social issues such as military coups, femicide, crime and immigration that open a space for the development of alternative voices. As Mutlu (2008: 184) points out, TV films/series not only dramatize social problems, but also publicly discuss these problems, thereby making them accessible. The power of television dramas to shape personal and social identities (Caughie 2012: 50) and their contribution to shaping the national imagination as a product of popular culture (Sandbrook 2015) are of great importance. It is also valuable as a space where the problems, wishes and cultural values of a society are clarified and negotiated (Steiner 2018).

## 2. RECENT HISTORY AND NARRATIVE IN *ETHOS*

### 2.1. Fault Lines of Recent History

Released on Netflix in November 2020, *Ethos* seems to take place today, but it draws a panoramic view of Turkey's recent history by referring to the 1980s and the 1990s in several scenes. The series builds its story on the fault lines of Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s through dualities such as secular and religious, Turkish and Kurdish, rich and poor, as well as center and periphery. In particular, using the secular, conservative and Kurdish identities in Turkey, it tells the encounter of different social segments that cannot be limited only to these identities. In this context, it gives the impression of a series made with the hope of reconciling a polarized society. The fact that the characters of *Ethos* and the elements that make up the atmosphere of the period come with anachronism and historical slips allows the reading of the series in the context of nostalgia. It also causes the structure, which cannot be separated from the present, to be questioned in the context of reality and fiction or representation and allegory relationship.

*Ethos* opens with the cleaning lady Meryem entering a luxury apartment with her key after coming from the periphery of the city and she faints while doing her daily routine. After the title of *Ethos*, which is shown over the chaotic view of

the city taken from an upper angle, we see Meryem sitting in front of the psychiatrist Peri at the state hospital. Behaving in a distant manner, Peri listens to Meryem, who tells her that she faints for no reason from time to time. However, Peri is bothered by Meryem's words when she says that she will not continue the sessions without getting permission from her mosque imam in their neighborhood. After her encounter with Meryem, Peri realizes that she distances herself from patients wearing hijabs and begins to question herself. In her routine meetings with her supervisor Gülbin, she tells her about Meryem. Meryem has impressed Peri with her intelligence and quick wit. However, for Peri, there is a wall that she needs to overcome that prevents her from establishing a healthy doctor-patient relationship with Meryem. This wall is the headscarf. In the face of this confession, Gülbin, who is of Kurdish origin, becomes uncomfortable with Peri's view of the hijab and identity, and drifts away from her. Gülbin also has her own problems. Her older sister Gülan, who wears a hijab that Peri is already uncomfortable with, is a newly rich, politically engaged conservative voter. The two sisters are constantly at odds over what is right for their adult brother at home, who was born with a disability (cerebral palsy) because their mother was hit whilst he was still in her womb. Gülbin tries to remedy the situation she cannot avoid by making love with the inept Sinan. Sinan, for whom Meryem works as a cleaning lady, is perhaps the most unsympathetic character of the series, living in a luxury residence and seemingly not working at any job. Although Sinan has a sexual relationship with Gülbin, he has his mind on the actress Melisa. The other person positioned opposite Peri, who will provide support for Meryem to find a way out spiritually, is the imam Ali Sadi. The imam is a mild-tempered man who gives general advice to everyone, and who leads a simple life with his wife and daughter; later in the series, it is revealed that the daughter is LGBTI. The older brother of Meryem, on the other hand, is Yasin, a former commando who works as a bodyguard in a bar. The story of Yasin and his raped wife Ruhiye proceeds in another direction. In short, in the series where Meryem's story is in focus, a portrait of Turkish people and their problems emerge with stories representing different socio-cultural segments.

In addition to attracting attention as a digital platform series, *Ethos* has been widely discussed in academic circles and in the popular media as it has triggered debates on the relationships, coexistence practices and problems of different social segments in Turkey (Çelenk 2020; Mollaer 2020; Kivanç 2020; Dellaloğlu 2020a; 2020b; 2020c; Taxidis 2021;

Özer and Gül 2021). These debates can be categorized under two main groups: the class-based political economy approach (Dellaloğlu 2020) and the identity-based allegorical, culturalist approach (Mollaer 2020).

Describing *Ethos* as an important series because of the hope and excitement it evokes, Özmen (2020) cites a series of opinions that summarize all its interpretations: On the one hand, *Ethos* "has a liberal/conservative perspective and embodies the liberal/conservative fantasy that does not give importance to the structural/class division in society and uses culture/identity issues instead". On the other hand, he expresses the thought that the series "brings structural divisions and class inequalities to the fore, and touches on some burning problems, such as the functioning of the capitalist machine, the Kurdish issue, trauma, and gender inequality". Özmen draws attention to a more fundamental issue in this dual structure: the originality of the series. He states that *Ethos* "(...) has a framework that calls us to confront ourselves and the other in ourselves, emphasizing that conflict and division are both between different subjectivities and within ourselves".

At another level, the series focuses on lifestyle, which has been frequently discussed in Turkey in recent years in the context of debates on class-identity (ethnic identity, sexual identity, etc.). Kalaycıoğlu (2012: 171-174) emphasizes that there are two contrasting images of "the good society" left to the Republic of Turkey from the Ottoman political legacy: On the one hand, those who form their lifestyles around the image of a good society that puts science and the human mind at the center; a secular perception of good society. On the other hand, those who prefer a lifestyle based on religion and tradition, a conservative perception of a good society. Although the concept of lifestyle has been frequently discussed in academic circles in Turkey with the phenomenon of consumption, it is also an area of discussion in contemporary politics. Kalaycıoğlu (2012: 174) emphasizes that the secularist-modernist center existed until the 1950s, changed rapidly since the 1950s and disappeared completely in the 1990s. Giddens (2001) states that while social classes still maintain their importance, traditional class distinctions are largely disappearing as individuals pursue various lifestyles that remove the boundaries between classes. Since lifestyle is influenced by factors such as demographics, social class, motivations, personality, emotions, family life curve, culture and past experiences, it provides a framework that also covers class-identity debates. Chaney (1996: 4) defines lifestyles as "patterns of action" that "help to make sense of what people

do, and why they do it, and what doing it means to them and others". It is possible to read the concept of lifestyle through class analysis (Bourdieu 1984) based on social status (Weber 1968) and cultural consumption. *Ethos* is the story of the encounter between the lifestyles of Peri, a secular, urban woman from the middle-upper class, and Meryem, a conservative, lower-income woman living on the periphery of the city. It makes the center-periphery paradigm (Mardin 1973) and its transformation visible. In Turkey, especially during the last two decades, these two lifestyles have been polarized and confronted (Erdoğan and Uyan Semerci 2018). In addition, the series also shows a clash of different lifestyles in the same family through the sisters Gülbin and Gülan.

The Turkish title *Bir Başkadır* references Ayten Alpman's song "Memleketim" ("My Country") ("Bir Başkadır Benim Memleketim" / "My Unique Country") that left its mark on the 1970s and enables the Generation X in Turkey (part of today's digital platform audience) to recall its own memories. The fact that "Memleketim", which became a cult song after the September 12 military coup, is selected for the title of the series features irony. Abbreviated as *Bir Başkadır*, the series deconstructs these references. The series brings together characters who are socially constructed "in terms of dominant ideologies" (Kellner 2010: 45) by building a number of equations. Outside Turkey, the series was released internationally by Netflix under the title *Ethos*. In philosophy, *ethos* is considered as the vital habits of individuals that belong to their past and shape their worldview (Cambridge Dictionary 2022). *Ethos* refers to a person's character and lifestyle based on habits. On the date of its release in Turkey, the series was ranked number one on the charts and featured in the "top 10" lists of Netflix in sixteen countries (Cumhuriyet 2020). In parallel to the interest from an international audience, the attention paid to the series by the academic community is also significant. For example, George Taxidis (2021) examines the series in the context of psychotherapy and gender, and although the series is specifically about Turkey, he states that *Ethos* "continuously dances around universal experiences of familiarity and alienation, skillfully depicting the act of relating to others as inherently full of pain and joy" (2021: 340).

## 2.2. Hybrid Narrative with Cinematic Flavors

Another reason why we consider *Ethos* within the framework of the concepts of cinematic mapping and nostalgia is that the audio-visual structure of the series is established at the intersection of these concepts. *Ethos* depicts a nostalgic gaze

cinematically through the concert footage of Ferdi Özbeğen and an impressionistic attitude similar to that encountered in the Turkish films of the 70s and 80s. The series draws a comparison between the image of Meryem trying to find her way in the crowds on the streets and overpasses of the city, shot from a high angle, and the texture of the films of the 1970s, which depict the new urbanite lost among the overlapping buildings of Istanbul. These elements of the series are also supported by its colors and 4:3 aspect ratio. The shots in which we see Meryem walking on the streets, avenues, and overpasses from a high angle, and in which we get closer to her with sudden zoom movements, carry flavors from the cinematic narrative of the 1970s. Showing the character in the flow of life on the street establishes a relationship between the material world and the characters in films (Ryan and Kellner 1988). This cinematography is adorned with traces of an attitude that describe ordinary people in their social reality. The characters we see in the films of many esteemed filmmakers of the 1970s, including Lütfi Akad, Yılmaz Güney, Zeki Ökten and Tunç Okan, who try to find their way in a crowd where they do not belong, who are poor, who resist in order not to be oppressed, and who differentiate themselves with their pride, resilience, and determination, have been replaced by Meryem in *Ethos*. In the series, which tells the stories of men and women rushing between home and work on the streets, working in factories and making their living the hard way, we see visual codes that reflect an alliance with the left-wing politics of the 1970s. Meryem also reveals the trace of social change in Turkey. With the Justice and Development Party, which borrowed the leftist rhetoric "on the side of the oppressed" in the early 2000s, Meryem's position has also changed.

*Ethos* also features the transformed elements of the impressionist attitude that we have come across in the films directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Zeki Demirkubuz who represent the New Turkish cinema. This cinema is known for its long-lasting fixed close-ups, monologues, still scenes, and shots that mark the moment. The first episode of *Ethos* opens with Meryem's nineteen-minute monologue. Because the series is a character-driven sectional story instead of a plot-driven one, it benefits from the codes of the New Turkish cinema. The credits also feature several film scenes that highlight and nourish the conflict between tradition and modernity, represented by Meryem and Peri in the series, with nostalgic references. These nostalgic references are established with the concert recordings of Ferdi Özbeğen, the old Istanbul images in the documentary *Bosphore* (1964, Maurice Pialat) in

the end credits of the fourth episode, and the Ankara scenes in the film *The Herd (Sürü)* (1979, Zeki Ökten, Yılmaz Güney). In short, the visual texture of the series, which includes an interesting omnivorous element, contains a hybrid aesthetic fed by the visual codes of Turkish cinema (from the films of the 1970s to the present day). This is precisely why *Ethos* has a cinematic flavor unlike any ordinary TV series. Despite the fact that it is a series that progresses with long dialogues, has few outdoor scenes and is dominated by theatrical elements, this cinematic flavor still persists. The use of music in *Ethos* is important enough to deserve a separate article. Since there was no copyright law in the 70s and 80s, foreign soundtracks were frequently used in Yeşilçam films. In *Ethos*, these music tracks are used to support the period atmosphere. In addition, songs by well-known artists, such as Ferdi Özbeğen, Zerrin Özer and Aşık Mahsuni are included in the credits. However, unlike the music used in Yeşilçam cinema, the soundtrack of the series is not a mere copy of another film soundtrack. These musical pieces, taken out of context and reused in *Ethos*, create a sense of authenticity found in the films of that period. This type of music usage also contributes to the hybrid narrative of the series.

### 3. FROM JAMESON TO KELLNER: FROM COGNITIVE MAPPING TO CINEMATIC MAPPING

Based on cognitive mapping, the concept of cinematic mapping was introduced by Kellner. Cognitive mapping refers to a cognitive structure used in various fields, such as environmental psychology, urban and regional planning, and is used to define a person's relationship with space. In this structure, within a contextual framework, the cultural characteristics, and the historical background of the society in which the person lives (the knowledge and perception of the environment that one lives in and what they represent for the person) are shaped in many ways due to various social and psychological factors (Göregenli et al. 2013: 30). It may be argued that "cognitive maps are not an exact reflection of the objective environment; they are cognitive representations in which physical reality is reconstructed together with social realities" (Göregenli 2013: 30-57). Jameson (1981; 1984; 1991) states that we are unable to map our past experiences due to major economic, political and social trends occurring globally. Seeking a solution to the inability to map and imagine past experiences, Jameson proposes a reconstruction of the cog-

nitive maps that were destroyed by postmodernism. Jameson (1984) uses the concept of cognitive mapping to point out the relationship and the position of individuals with their social spheres. He draws on Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* (1960) which explores how individuals in cities imagine their surroundings. In his empirical study, Lynch (1960) shows that, in an alienated city, people are unable to map the city and their own position in their minds. Jameson establishes a relationship between Lynch's and Althusser's definition of ideology. According to Althusser (1971), "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence". Jameson (1991: 52) argues that Althusser's definition "allows us to rethink these specialized geographical and cartographic issues in terms of social space". Using Althusser's redefinition of ideology, Jameson (1991: 54) expands the concept of cognitive mapping by including ideological criticism and therefore, comes up with a global definition of cognitive mapping on a social and spatial scale. Jameson (1991: 52) seeks to "cognitively map our individual social relationship to local, national and international class realities". Within this framework, the cognitive map works as a model for individuals to develop class consciousness. Therefore, he hopes that a class consciousness will help people determine their place in the social totality dominated by the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1991). In his preface to Jameson's book *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), MacCabe (1992: xiv) notes that this new model can work as an "intersection of the personal and the social". MacCabe further argues that it also provides a model that we can use to bring together the local and the global as well as the micro and the macro. The model functions as a "metaphor for the process of [the] political unconscious" (MacCabe 1992: xv). According to Shuqair (2019: 364), "the political unconscious herein is how individuals are already part of a broader socio-political context of which they are most likely unaware, but which nevertheless shapes who they are and what actions they can or cannot take in their own society and world".

Douglas Kellner (2010: 18) states that the aim of cinematic mappings is to "represent historical events, individuals, character types, cultural norms and other defining features of a specific society". Taking influence from Fredric Jameson's (1981; 1992) concept of cognitive mapping, in which film texts, literary texts or cultural texts contribute to the process of placing an individual in a broader social context (the society where one lives or the world in general), Kellner (2010: 45, footnote 18) develops cinematic mapping. Jameson states that such mapping consists of a mixture of ideology and uto-



pia, and in many cases constructs individuals according to dominant ideologies; however, they may also reflect the utopian motto “another life is possible”. Drawing attention to the fact that cinematic realism is fiction and using the historical dramas of Oliver Stone as an example, Kellner (2010: 45) describes films as “interpretations whose critical visions of social and historical realities have their own ideological and idiosyncratic biases and perspectives. Properly interpreted and contextualized, films can provide key insights into specific historical persons, events, or eras”. In this context, Kellner (2010: 45 footnote 18) argues that cinematic mapping “shows some of the ways that cinema constructs visions of social, political, and individual life that provides access — often distorted by ideology and bias — to contemporary social life, politics, and history.”

As an allegory, *Ethos* can be considered as a call to create cognitive maps by confronting the social issues related to the present and the past. In the series, the individual and social groups attempt to reconstruct this map together while trying to position themselves in today’s crisis of identity, class, status, and belonging. *Ethos* also describes the need to start somewhere, despite possible shortcomings and mistakes, for the reconstruction of the map.

### 2.3. Reckoning/Confrontation

In the context of social issues, *Ethos* returns to the 1990s to question recent history. Although the 1990s was not the beginning of Turkey’s problems, it marks one of the breaking points at which the knot of these problems became visible. The 90s were a period when distinctions based on secularism, religion and ethnic identity in Turkey had sharpened (Barbaros and Zurcher 2017; Heper and Sayan 2012). Not accepting hijab-clad students at universities and the emergence of protests against this, the increase in terror attacks by the PKK, and the conducting of low-intensity warfare in areas where Kurds live in large numbers are examples of the political and social tensions that emerged during the 1990s. Perhaps for this very reason, *Ethos* draws a connection between the present and the past and addresses the issue through a conscious temporal shift. In other words, the series considers the 1990s as a touchstone or a field of confrontation in solving today’s crisis of identity, class, status and belonging. However, it is a separate discussion topic to evaluate whether the characters representing different social groups are successfully created in a way that will enable this confrontation to occur. Whether these representations are provided on a realistic ba-

sis or whether the existing stereotypes are strengthened by repetition instead of creating a confrontation are also other questions that will not be discussed in this article.

“Confronting the past refers to a daring attitude of being open to discussing the problematic past as well as revealing and being ready to accept the truth about this past” (Sancar 2007: 32-33). Therefore, confrontation also includes “giving up on blocking the collective memory” (Sancar 2007: 33) by bringing repressed and postponed issues to the agenda. *Ethos* ventures into controversial areas, most notably in the area of identity, and in a sense attempts to lift the veils that block memories through social “rehabilitation”. However, the burden is quite heavy. Touching on the long-standing fundamental issues and nerve endings of Turkey in the triangle of religion, secularism, and ethnic identity, the series nudges the breaking points of today’s construction in the context of the social segments represented by its characters. More precisely, it offers a perspective on ongoing issues in the context of Turkey’s changing conjuncture (it is the reason why the series has attracted so much attention). *Ethos* is promoted by Netflix with the following: “They have different lives, different dreams, different fears. Even if they seem opposite to each other, when their paths cross, the borders will disappear and they will all touch each other’s lives”. So even if their paths cross, do the boundaries between the characters really disappear?

Considering the representation of certain characters and their current realities it is also evident that certain characters have changed places from the 90s to the present day. For example, it is clear that the secular representation symbolized by Peri and her family, who hold economic power, is no longer the way it is presented in the series today. Positions in society, especially economic power, have already been reversed. In addition, it can be seen that the imam Ali Sadi, who symbolizes the conservative groups’ relationship with religion, is now a figure that can rarely be encountered in society. Similarly, Meryem, who comes from the periphery, has already settled in the city center.

### 2.4. Spaces / Houses

*Ethos’* narrative, constructed through the characters and the socio-cultural sphere they represent, hints at Kellner’s cinematic mapping of social life, politics and recent history. Each of the spaces is sociologically structured to express a group: The hospital room, the mosque, the yoga studio, the café, the nightclub, the house of Meryem on the urban periph-

ery, the residence of Sinan who lives in the city center, and so on. Except for the scenes in which Meryem wanders the streets and urban peripheries and a small number of scenes between the imam Ali Sadi and Meryem's older brother Yasin, we do not see much of the life on the streets, the flow of daily living and the social reality. We also rarely see the village of Ruhiye, who returns there alone. Over the course of the eight episodes of *Ethos*, the exterior space serves a different function than the interior space. Outdoor scenes are scenes where the series breathes and which allow us to establish a relationship between the social classes, identities or lifestyles represented by the spaces. In other words, these scenes allow us to witness the entire social reality of the series. On one level, the characters who cross paths with each other in certain contexts do not yet know about each other's home/world (even those with similar lifestyles) and keep their distance. The distance between them also reflects the distance between the social classes they represent (religious, secular, Kurdish, and white Turk<sup>5</sup>) outside the areas where they intersect with each other.

Located on the urban periphery, Meryem's house is the home of a low-income, religious, traumatized family. Her older brother, who served as a commando in the military and works as a bodyguard in a bar, is religious, bad-tempered and sensitive. Meryem lives with her older brother Yasin, his wife Ruhiye and their children. Ruhiye is a young woman who prays five times a day, but who always loses the direction of the qibla, and she tries to cope with her past trauma. As the series progresses, it is revealed that Ruhiye was raped by a Kurdish man who had migrated to their village, and that Meryem's commando brother Yasin found out about this just before they got married, but neither the woman nor the brother ever confronted this trauma. One day Ruhiye suddenly says that she wants to go to the village. After this request, Yasin takes his daughter, his son who never speaks, Ruhiye, and Meryem, and goes to the village. Ruhiye suffers a mental crisis during the journey between cities. Yasin had fought enough to injure the man who raped Ruhiye, and yet he tells Ruhiye that the man is dead. Yasin cannot continue the journey any longer and he turns the car back towards home. Instead of confronting the trauma to overcome it, he suppresses his feelings. Both physically and metaphorically,

they cannot get away from their homes, and they postpone the confrontation even though they are so close to it. This confrontation is made by Ruhiye, who returns to the village with her son. Her rapist, who is alive, begs for forgiveness. Ruhiye gets better, and her son starts to talk on the way home. The only scene where Ruhiye goes out of her house is the village scene towards the end of the series.

The mansion of Peri's parents is a house on the shores of the Bosphorus, which symbolizes the wealthy, sophisticated class of an era. However, today, the new owners of this mansion have been the group represented by Gülbin's older sister Gülan. Although Gülbin has a private clinic, Peri's clinic is at a public hospital. The room of this clinic shows that Peri cannot step outside the dominant ideological axis (secular-modernist) of her family. As the antithesis of the secularists, the imam Ali Sadi's house represents the house of a tolerant clergyman. Hayrunnisa, the shy and introverted daughter of the imam (it is later revealed that she is his step-daughter), charts her own path after the death of her mother. Revealing her LGBTI identity, Hayrunnisa leaves her home to go to university. With their differing and conflicting views, Gülbin's parents' house represents a Kurdish home. Sinan's house, on the other hand, is the house of a cynical and inept man where different social groups intersect and use. In contrast to the urban periphery from where Meryem comes, this residence in the center of the city is the home of a white Turk where Meryem works as a cleaner. Moreover, that white Turk is actually a young man from the neighborhood of his mother (this is revealed after he visits her mother). In fact, Sinan is a child of the neighborhood located in the former city center, but somehow at some point, he has managed to climb the social ladder. Another story of a leap at the intellectual level is that of Hilmi, the imam's apprentice, who falls in love with Meryem at first sight and engages in a conversation on Jung at a coffeehouse. Hilmi appears to be the prototype of the intellectual political Islamists who were introduced to Marxism, the Frankfurt School and psychoanalysis in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Talking to his friends, Hilmi tells them about Jung and the philosophy of the series: "A Swiss scientist talks about a belief in the existence of a supreme being, but he says it differently than the writings of Islam, or for example, the Torah, Christianity, or the Quran. It's a matter of being an individual. Mind you, I'm not talking about individualization. What am I saying? Being an individual, he says. There's a social unconscious phenomenon, and Jung describes it as the collective unconscious. What we all have in common are these unconscious states".

5 As a concept, white Turk has emerged with the increase in migration from rural to urban areas due to the effect of neo-liberal policies after 1980 and is used to describe the urban elite in Turkey. The concept was widely used in the 1990s and the 2000s to refer to a minority with a high economic level who adopted a Western and secular lifestyle.

What Hilmi describes here through Jung is the mapping in our social unconscious. On this map, Hilmi does not have a house, and we never see Peri's own house. We only see Peri once in their mansion on the shores of the Bosphorus, and this is after a scene in which Peri is psychologically shaken. In this sense, Peri is actually homeless. Peri is self-critical of her negative attitude towards the headscarf and her class perspective, which she says she inherited from her mother. Peri attributes her feelings and thoughts, even her prejudices, to her upbringing. Although her mother's view of people from different segments of society is ingrained in her, she thinks she is never like her mother, until she realizes how similar they are. It is only when she mistakenly refers to Meryem by the name of the woman (Hazel) who works in her mother's house that she realizes her mistake in creating the prototype of women with the headscarf in her mind and depriving them of their identity to the point of calling them by the same name. Drawing on Lacan, Zizek (1989:58) argues that "in the symptom, the repressed content is returning from the future". The fact that Peri confuses Meryem's name with the name of her mother's cleaning lady and the fact that she becomes aware of this can be read as a sign of healing in the face of the social segments she is prejudiced against. If what is repressed comes from "the future", as Zizek states, then this would mean that Peri will make a new beginning with Meryem.

Unlike the cramped living space of Peri, Meryem is everywhere: on the main streets of the city, on the bus, in the neighborhoods on the urban periphery, in the hospital, in the imam's house, in the mosque, and in Sinan's luxurious residence. It is Meryem who sees and lives in the city from one end to the other. Each of these spaces reflects the characters' own world and represents their class/identity. It is also Meryem who moves between all these spaces and connects the stories to each of them, helping us to draw a cinematic mapping of different social segments. The map in the minds of the audience of *Ethos* is constructed with Meryem, who is intelligent, sensitive, and uneducated, yet prudent, conservative and outgoing. Meryem can be described in Sina Koloğlu's (2020) words as "the neighborhood girl who smells of stove smoke", and she provides the meeting/encounter between all social segments. At the same time, she indirectly causes the audience to repair the torn pieces in the destroyed mental map. The male characters we often see in the films of the 1970s dealing with "social" problems that walk the streets, resist and strive against the oppression of the city, and at the same time try to exist in the urban crowd, have been replaced by a female character, Meryem, representing the hijab-wearing segment in a digital platform series in 2020.

Moreover, the social responsibility of Meryem who crosses the city from one end to the other and whose passage through the overpasses is witnessed by an observant camera, goes beyond eras and spreads over a much wider period of time.

## 2.5. Encounters

*Ethos'* call for confrontation is based on encounters. The characters' encounters take place in many places: Meryem and Peri in the hospital, Peri and the actress Melisa in the yoga studio, Gülbin and Meryem in the residence corridor, Peri and Gülan in her sister Gülbin's office; and Meryem's older brother Yasin and the imam Ali Sadi's daughter Hayrunnisa in the bar and on the street. In addition to such encounters, the television screen also serves as a space of encounters.

Peri's mother watches the TV series starring Melisa in her mansion on the shores of the Bosphorus; the same series is also watched in the slums by Meryem and her older brother Yasin, and in one of the residences of the city by Sinan. A meta-narrative is created by *Ethos* when its characters from different places, cultures, classes and lifestyles watch the same content. Television is described by Gerbner as the most democratic and classless mass media tool and it makes these encounters possible between the characters of the series. We, the audience who watches *Ethos* experience a similar encounter. According to Gerbner and his colleagues (2002: 55), within the framework of the "Cultural Indicators" approach, television puts beliefs, thoughts, relatively static and common images in people's minds. Therefore, thanks to television, which is the new storyteller, people from all walks of life can share many cultural images. The differing views between the traditional television audience and the digital platform audience become critically evident in the dialogues of Melisa and Peri. Melisa says, "Don't watch, it's stupid anyway, it's a 'total' job." Peri asks, "What does 'total'<sup>6</sup> mean?" Melisa replies, "You know, the general audience. Anatolia, slum, that style."

Much like the characters in Zeki Demirkubuz's *Innocence (Masumiyet)* or Reha Erdem's *My Only Sunshine (Hayat Var)* watching old Turkish films in front of a television screen, the characters of *Ethos* also watch the TV series *The Pit (Çukur)* or popular reality shows targeting female audiences, such as *Esra Erol'da (At Esra Erol)*, at home in front of the television. While the meta-narrative in the series reveals the distinctions between the Yeşilçam cinema audience, the traditional tele-

6 In the dialogue, the word "total" is used in English to describe the general audience.

vision audience, and the digital platform audience, it complements the social mapping with the encounters it displays through the television screen.

### 3. RESTORING THE LOST PRESENT THROUGH NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia has no single, absolute definition. Nostalgia almost looks like “an old, crusted wound that bleeds again” (Sarı 2017: 12). In this context, it references both the wound and the healing. The concept can “accommodate progressive, even utopian impulses as well as regressive stances and melancholic attitudes” (Keightley & Pickering 2006: 919). It can be claimed that the slogan “another life is possible”, articulated with a utopian attitude, is related to a nostalgic perspective. We believe that it is possible to argue this, at least in the context of *Ethos*. In a sense, nostalgia can be considered as the temporal inverse twin of utopia. Beyond being a longing for the past, nostalgia can be comprehended in terms of remembering and reminding us of the possibilities of the past. The series can be read as an attempt to complete a confrontation that has not yet taken place, both in terms of the lives of the people it depicts and in the context of Turkey’s recent history. Segal (2005: 34) suggests that “nostalgia as represented and explored in photography, cinema and story-telling has the potential to further both self and societal understanding through reflection, reinterpretation and ultimately transformation”. The series *Ethos* brings this potential to the surface.

In the series the ambiguity about whether the events take place in the recent past or in the present is extremely interesting. How can this temporal twist or slip be explained? What can this historical slip be associated with? In his article entitled “*Bir Başkadır: Boşluktaki Mesafeler*” (“*Ethos: Distances in the Void*”) in *Altyazı*, Ekrem Buğra Büte (2020) responds to this question with a sincere grasp of the sociological basis of *Ethos* and defines the attitude in the series as “a sad glance of compassion, thrown with the anxiety that a sense of homeland, which for a long time could not be grasped or patched, had been lost”. This compassionate glance is a nostalgic one. Nostalgia should not be considered only in the sense of seeking refuge in a familiar time or of escaping to a safe space in order to overcome the profound sense of unhappiness and despair felt in the present<sup>7</sup>. Indeed, “contemporary nostalgia

is not so much about the past as about the vanishing present” (Boym 2001: 351). Precisely for today, the series takes a nostalgic look at what has been lost and proposes a utopian reconstruction. Therefore, the sense of nostalgia conveyed by *Ethos* is identical with the anxiety of losing the present. In this context, the series seeks solutions to present-day problems in shared memories which can unite the social groups/audiences that drift away from each other. These memories are hidden in the audio-visual codes of the Yeşilçam cinema, which reinforces the feeling of the “common goodness”. As we have mentioned in the hybrid narrative section, the text of *Ethos* written with the typography of the 1980s Yeşilçam films, the camera from a high angle that watches ordinary people in their social reality with zoom movements, and the music borrowed from the Yeşilçam cinema function as reconciling codes. These reconciling audio-visual codes refer to the eras that were viewed together on screen by different generations and social groups who grew up with Yeşilçam films.

The chaotic city landscape through which Meryem passes consists of roofs covered with satellite dishes, laundry hanging from balconies, overpasses, and minibuses lined up in traffic. For the audience familiar with the 1990s, these images, together with all their flaws, reinforce the sense of the common past.

In the search for a reconciling past, time can also be considered as an element that softens both certain memories and a reckoning. As noted by Dede & Çoruk in their article titled “‘Eski’ ve ‘Yeni’ Türkiye Arasında Özal Nostaljisi” (“Nostalgia for Özal Between ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Turkey”) (2020), the dissatisfaction felt when looking at the distant past may change the passing time and we can see the negative stance as softened or altered. According to the authors:

The increasing distance between the past and the present affects our view of the past, and this inevitably brings nostalgia into the context of the debate. (...) The role of nostalgia as a political, social and psychological phenomenon in the twenty-first century deeply affects almost all the ways of relating to the past and also the perception of the aftermath of September 12 in Turkey.

In their article, the authors compare the way in which Özal’s politics have been made a subject of nostalgia to the way in which De Gaulle has been a subject of nostalgia by both the government and the opposition. In the same way that Özal becomes an element of nostalgia for different po-

7 Suner (2010) gives examples from the post-2000 Turkish cinema to illustrate that nostalgia in the narrative has been transformed into a kind of shelter.

litical tendencies when considered from today's perspective, Ferdi Özbeğen's music, which sets the atmosphere of the period in the end credits of *Ethos*, creates a sense of nostalgia symbolizing the Özal<sup>8</sup> era following September 12. Although secularists distance themselves from the arabesque music and what it represents culturally, the music of Ferdi Özbeğen is part of the common past they share with conservatives, and this music establishes a periodical atmosphere in which cultural distances can be ignored when viewed from the present. In the end credits of the series, Ferdi Özbeğen addresses the audience from a concert recording in the 1980s: "Aşkımı bir sır gibi senelerdir sakladım" ("I've kept my love like a secret for years") ... just like the way many secrets and unsolved problems exist for years.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Digital platforms have offered a breath of fresh air to TV series by creating alternative approaches both in content and in terms of narrative and aesthetics. Another important contribution of digital platforms is the increased international screening opportunities. *Ethos* is a concrete example of this. The series almost serves as a catalyst for the return of what remains unspoken and repressed due to the political conjuncture and climate. People have been polarized as a result of the power strategies and belligerent policies of the last two decades (Erdoğan and Uyan Semerci 2018) and in a space where the problems, demands and cultural values of a society are clarified and negotiated (Steiner 2018), *Ethos* can be read as a call for confrontation for a new cognitive map, especially in a period when people's desire to coexist has been severely damaged. The series has opened a space for people from different classes/identities to reflect on or to recognize each other's lifestyles.

Calling for confrontation, *Ethos* attempts to create a new cognitive map, but fails to embody it. The series creates only an optimistic call for how to rebuild our destroyed cognitive map. This optimistic call involves creating a cognitive map of a sense of home/homeland by reconsidering our class, identity and lifestyles. Therefore, cinematic mapping offers a method of positioning and reconceptualization in order to comprehend shifting positions in Turkey and to develop a new perspective through which shifting identities are anchored.

8 After the military coup of September 12, 1980, Turgut Özal became prime minister and adopted neo-liberal policies (Pamuk 2014; Şenses 2017).

The series employs a nostalgic look to establish the vanishing present and does this through a hybrid narrative. This hybrid narrative is constructed through references to both the films of the 70s and the music of the 80s, as well as to the New Turkish Cinema after 1995. Therefore, the hybrid narrative not only keeps the audience interested but also serves a creative function for the temporal twists in the series.

Macherey (1978) argues that the place to look for ideology in literary texts lies in the meaningful silences in the text. The places where the series remains silent are the issues of religion and ethnic identity, which constitute the fundamental problems of the founding of the Republic. Despite its reticence on certain of Turkey's fundamental issues, *Ethos* attracts the attention of the audience because it makes a call for social confrontation.

It is obvious that the series on traditional television, which are the dominant example of popular culture, have for a long time avoided addressing individual and social issues, preferring to turn a blind eye to daily life. *Ethos* depicts real problems (forgotten or postponed issues) through deeply felt characters and, in this sense, creates a place for the audience to experience a confrontation. We interpret *Ethos* as a meaningful and valuable case in terms of telling stories that address social/political issues with reference to Ryan's (1988) and Ryan and Kellner's (1988) views on the connection between popular cinema and the masses. In this respect, as a platform series, we consider *Ethos* as a successful and significant example on the matter.

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## TV Series

- Bir Başkadır* (Ethos) (2020)  
*Yeşilçam* (2021)  
*Kulüp* (2022)

## Documentaries and Films

- Bosphore* (1964)  
*Sürü (The Herd)* (1978)  
*Yol* (1982)





# TRANSNATIONAL AUDIENCES OF TURKISH DRAMAS: THE CASE OF SWEDEN<sup>1</sup>

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## KEYWORDS

Turkish TV series; reception analysis; Sweden; cultural encounters; media audiences.

## ABSTRACT

The Swedish public service television company, SVT (Sveriges Television), has been airing Turkish dramas regularly for the past decade. By examining the reception of Turkish TV series in Sweden, this ongoing research aims to shed light on the cultural exchange between the two countries and to contribute to ongoing debates surrounding the role of television series in facilitating transcultural encounters. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the audience's reception of Turkish television series in Sweden, this study employs in-depth interviews with loyal viewers, bloggers who wrote about Turkish dramas and executives at SVT and the Eccho Rights distribution company, which played a role in bringing these series to Sweden. This approach allows for a nuanced examination of the motivations, perceptions, and experiences surrounding the broadcast and reception of Turkish TV series in Sweden. The paper concludes that Turkish TV series that appeal to Swedish audiences with a range of unique and compelling elements tend to create loyal audiences with strong ties to these shows.

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## INTRODUCTION

Turkish TV series have entered international circulation at an increasing rate since the 2000s and have reached a wide range of audiences, especially in the Middle East, the Balkans, East Europe, and Central Asia (Alankuş and Yanardağoğlu 2016). The popularity and remarkable transnational success of Turkish TV drama series continued with new audiences from different countries in Latin America, the Far East (Doğanay and Atik 2016) and Nordic countries.<sup>2</sup> Universal themes such as love, passion, intrigue, conflicts, virtue, betrayal, honor, life, death, and family values, which express the feelings of the global audience and touch their emotions, have a high share in the global success of TV dramas around the world. These themes are handled extensively in Turkish TV series. Plenty of academic studies on the international success of Turkish TV series focus on geo-cultural and geo-linguistic factors; debates such as cultural proximity, cultural diplomacy, and globalization; elements such as production quality and images of modernity, and they are mainly carried out with a political-economic perspective (Karlıdağ and Bulut 2014; Yeşil 2015; Öztürk and Atik 2016; Berg 2017; Özalpman 2017; Kaptan and Algan 2020). The transnational reception of Turkish TV series is limited to a few studies (Uysal 2011; Yanardağoğlu and İmad 2013; Anaz 2014; Çaylı Rahte 2017; Aslan 2019; Saleem and Sadik 2021; Suhud et al. 2021) focusing on why and how Turkish TV series are watched in the Middle East, the Balkans, and Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

Audio-visual narratives play a vital role in the formation of social imagination. In transnational cultural encounters mediated by the media, challenging or strengthening stereotypes about “cultural others” is highly related to cultural proximity, awareness, or perception of cultural distance. Based on this basic assumption, this paper reports on some early findings and discussions from my ongoing research project with the main goal of exploring how Turkish TV series are received and how they contribute to the image of Turkey in the minds

of the audience in Sweden. In my research, I aim to examine the connection between the “real” interactions that people have in their daily lives and the extended, “mediated” encounters that are prevalent in a media-saturated society, in order to understand the cultural and social context in which the audience experiences these encounters. This will involve analyzing the role that media plays in shaping the audience’s perception of reality.

I also aim to examine the “lived experiences” (Yoon 2018) of the audience as they engage with television dramas, with a focus on understanding their motivations for choosing and watching certain shows. I seek to explore how the audience perceives and relates to these dramas and how they incorporate them into their daily lives. This will involve analyzing the ways in which the audience uses and shares these shows in their everyday routines. In other words, I want to understand and interpret the “media practices” of the audiences. Nick Couldry (2004, 2012) suggested the concept of “media practices” as comprising acts performed through – and pre-conditioned upon – media. Media practices are open sets of practices that cannot be analyzed narrowly with a text-centered focus but through a holistic perspective catching all-encompassing attendance to practices manifesting around different media uses and their consequences on social practices and meanings of the social world (Couldry 2012; Seufferling 2022). “Media practices” have been figured out with a scope of media itself as well.

Apart from the fieldwork, qualitative content analysis has been employed to find out how Turkish TV series are covered, discussed, or commented on in the Swedish online media. I try to answer what media content the Swedish audiences create via blogs, social media groups and internet forums. Although they are watched by large audience groups in East Europe and some other European countries as well, such as Spain and Sweden, there is no specific audience research on Turkish dramas in these areas. Sweden has been broadcasting Turkish TV series on its national channels since 2013.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, my research examines why and how Swedish audiences watch Turkish TV series by examining the audience of these programs, related media coverage, and

2 “How popular are Turkish TV series in Latin America?” <https://www.quora.com/How-popular-are-Turkish-TV-series-in-Latin-America> (last accessed 12-11-2022).

“Anders Björkman: Best new foreign series is Turkish” <https://www.expressen.se/noje/recensioner/tv/anders-bjorkman-basta-nya-utlandska-serie-ar-turkisk/> (last accessed 12-11-2022).

3 Apart from the transnational audiences of Turkish television series, there is a limited amount of research on the diasporic and transnational audiences of Turkish films (Kevin Smets 2013) or diasporic media cultures of Turkish immigrants (Çiğdem Bozdağ et. al. 2012).

4 In the order of broadcasting dates on SVT, so far, six Turkish television series have been broadcasted on the Swedish national broadcasting channel: *Son “The End-Lögnen”* (2013), *20 Dakika “20 Minutes-20 Minuter”* (2014), *Paramparça “Broken Pieces-Förväxlingen”* (2016), *Cesur ve Güzel “Brave and Beautiful-Hämnad och Kärlek”* (2019), *Anne “Mother-Modern och Dottern”* (2020), *Kırmızı Oda “The Red Room-Själens Röda Rum* (2021). “Själens röda rum” is in the “popular” category of SVT play “series” list.

those who buy TV serials for distribution in Sweden. The reception study includes audience ethnography (in-depth interviews with Swedish audiences that vary by ethnicity, gender, age, and occupation), interviews (with purchasing officers and sales managers of Swedish national channels, distribution, and copyright companies), and content analysis (the coverage of Turkish TV series in Swedish online media and social media platforms). The analysis from the Swedish online media will provide a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects of the relationship between the Swedish audience and Turkish TV series and complement the findings from the field. However, the focus of this article is on the early findings of my field research, which does not include an analysis of the media coverage, a key element within the scope of my overall research.

The theoretical framework of the research centers on the synthesis of national, transnational, collective, and subjective elements (Bondebjerg 2020) of cultural encounters in the imagination of the audience. In this paper, I briefly describe the theoretical stance of the research and its connection to the fieldwork and provide some highlights from my interviews with Swedish viewers, bloggers who wrote about Turkish dramas, and officials from SVT and Echo Rights, I also mention the difficulties I have experienced in the field and my strategies for coping with the obstacles I have encountered. In line with Sweden's diverse and multicultural population, the Swedish audience for Turkish television series includes viewers of Nordic, Baltic, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern backgrounds, as well as members of the Turkish diaspora. This reflects the broad appeal of these series among a range of cultural groups in Sweden. In my ongoing field research, I try to capture the diversity of the audience for Turkish television series in Sweden, including viewers of various cultural backgrounds. By conducting interviews with the viewers from the Turkish diaspora, which are still in progress and therefore not reflected in this paper, I investigate the meaning of the aura (Kaptan 2020) created by Turkish TV series in the lives of diasporic viewers of Turkish origin, who watch these series in order to maintain a connection to their cultural heritage. Apart from the general audience, the research will also include interviews with Swedish journalists, media professionals, and a lot more bloggers who have an interest in or have written or broadcasted about Turkish dramas are also in progress.

## 1. THE THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAME OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS RELATION TO THE FIELDWORK

### 1.1. Audience ethnographies in the context of diasporic transnationalism

In *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (1995) Marie Gillespie focuses on "TV Talk" of adolescent British Asians living in London. She concluded that media talk provided the young audience with resources to mediate among the native culture, the dominant culture, and the global culture through the process of self-narration and cultural translation. Gillespie's study provides evidence that TV can be a powerful tool in mediating cultural identity and providing a platform for exploration and exchange of different cultural values and beliefs. By examining the experiences and perspectives of the diasporic viewers, this study sheds light on the role of Turkish TV series in shaping identity and fostering a sense of belonging among members of the diaspora.

In her study *Diaspora, Identity and the Media: Diasporic Transnationalism and Mediated Spatialities* (2006), Myria Georgiou carried out an in-depth study of the media consumption of the Greek/Greek Cypriot communities in London and New York. She observed that the diasporic media contributed substantially to the everyday living and identity negotiation of individuals. Georgiou pointed out that the diasporic media created a diasporic community, members of which have a perspective beyond the nation-state and cosmopolitan understanding of the self and their community. Media consumption helped to reinforce diasporic identities, as well as to create a sense of shared values and collective memory. Furthermore, she argued that media consumption was a way for individuals to maintain links between the diaspora and their homeland. Therefore, the acceptance and fascination of Turkish series by viewers in Sweden is particularly significant for Turkish-origin viewers in terms of preserving their connection to their country of origin.

The term "diaspora" has been widely used for any group which has migrated away from its homeland. The notion of "diaspora" is related to the idea of cultural dislocation. Members of diaspora retain a conscious or subconscious attachment to the traditions, customs, values, religions, and languages of their ancestral home. Home may be far removed in time and space, but they constantly return to it through an act of imagination – they return to "imaginary homelands"

(Eswari 2014: 28). Diaspora identities produce and reproduce themselves through transformation and differences (Hall 1997).

In their prominent research on how Turkish families living in London receive Turkish channels in their daily life, Kevin Robins and Asu Aksoy (2005) have improved the conceptualization of “cultural de-mythologisation”. They discovered that following Turkish media content had a “demystifying” effect on diasporic audiences by presenting them with a closer look into their homeland. Keeping up with Turkish media content creates a sort of realistic insight by preventing nostalgic idealization tendencies and cultural mythologisation. The conceptualization of Robins and Aksoy is used in the research to interpret the Turkish-Swedish audiences’ reception of Turkish dramas and the imagery of Turkey in their minds.

The global circulation of media content has increased the importance of discussing transnational cultural encounters in audience research. Adopting the idea that there is a creative interaction between transnational and indigenous cultures, Tristan Mattelart (2010) suggests that audiences create new cultural forms by synthesizing foreign cultural forms with their local realities. In the context of television series audiences, global media content can be seen as fostering reflexivity and contributing to the development of a critical perspective by encouraging audiences to reflect on their everyday lives. On a global scale, the audience is presented with imagery that they can easily relate to and interpret using their own cultural codes, leading to a sense of similarity and connection (Çaylı Rahte 2017). This study intends to capture the self-reflexivity of audiences in their relationship with Turkish dramas.

To figure out how they make sense of the stories and self-reflective dialogues in Turkish TV series within the context of their everyday lives and to uncover dominant, negotiated, and oppositional reading practices by audiences, I informed them about the current criticisms of Turkish TV series to help them construct their critiques from different perspectives. First, I mentioned how Turkish dramas are praised for their high production quality and for effectively addressing universal themes and emotions. Then, I asked what the best parts of Turkish dramas are and why these dramas have caught their attention. I also reminded them that Turkish dramas have been criticized for reproducing traditional gender roles and discriminatory discourses, promoting violence against vulnerable groups, particularly against women, and for issues with representation such as “symbolic annihilation”, misrepresentation or underrepresentation of women, differ-

ent gender groups, LGBTs, ethnic groups, age discrimination, and class prejudices.

To gain insight into how participants interpret and make sense of Nordic TV dramas and other dramas from different nations, I asked if they also watch Nordic dramas, Korean dramas, and Latin American dramas. I requested that participants compare these different genres, if they have any knowledge about. These types of questions allowed a comparative analysis of the way national, transnational, collective, and subjective elements of cultural encounters are synthesized in the imagination of the viewer. I adapted Ib Bondebjerg’s three categories, namely:

- *Subjective encounters* (the link that the audience establishes between their own personal life and the stories presented in media narratives)
- *Collective encounters* (knitted around the sense of “we”, local, regional, national and transnational patterns and partnerships and separations established by variables such as class, gender, etc.)
- *Universal cognitive-emotional encounters* (themes such as death, love, etc. of people in different parts of the world) (Bondebjerg 2020).

I collected stories about the participants’ personal ties, attachments, and encounters with Turkish dramas. I asked the viewers if they had any ties to Turkey through their origin, friendships, or family, and if they had any interest in Turkish culture. That’s why I tried to figure out if they have ties with Turkey in terms of origin, friendships, family members etc.; if they have ever been to Turkey or if they have any special interest in Turkish culture in terms of music, food, traditional arts. etc. During the interviews, I had the opportunity to capture how the subjective elements of each person’s connection with a TV series touched on different aspects of their personal stories. For instance, Helen,<sup>5</sup> one of the interviewees, said she was drawn to the TV series *Red Room* (2021) because her daughter is a psychologist, and she advised her daughter to watch it at the same time. Another viewer, Annika said that she watched the TV series *Mother* (2020) because she had a difficult time balancing work, life, motherhood and all the challenges she had to struggle with. That’s why she was very impressed and inspired by the strong mother character. Another interviewee, Maria expressed her interest in the actors and male characters because she says she has al-

5 Information about the interviews, including the participants, their background information, date and place of the interview can be seen in the “General Information About the Interviewees” table in the next section.

ways found Middle Eastern men very attractive and finally she got married to a Turkish man. More highlights from the interviews can be seen in the next section.

## 1.2. Cultural hybridity and cosmopolitan cultural universe through mediatized everyday life encounters

“Hybridity” is central to the diasporic identity (Bhabha 1994). Diasporic identities are constructs and they are related to “diaspora spaces” which means the intersection of borders where all subjects and identities become “juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed” (Eswari 2014). Following Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) framework, it can be said that the way images circulate globally through media constructs deterritorialized identities. Building on Benedict Anderson’s arguments that “imagined communities” form nations, Appadurai postulates that transnational or postcolonial diasporas are “imagined” through the images produced by mass media. These images flow across the world, blurring boundaries to create new cultural geographies and transcultural identities (Eswari 2014). “Hybrid imagined communities” are “never secluded and bounded away from the Other” (Georgiou 2006: 156) and hybrid individuals find themselves constantly in conversation with the Other in everyday life (Ong 2009). Such encounters are counted as an opportunity for the subject to be ‘decentered’ and thus to become a springboard for redefining boundaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Levinas 1969). Repeated encounters with differences in the banality of daily life, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah argues (2006: 77, as cited in Ong 2009), have the potential to transform the way we deal with others over time.

The imagination of other cultures is lived and performed in everyday life. Television helps to bring the native culture closer, allowing the local community to familiarize themselves with their native cultural media products while simultaneously offering a view of the global society (Eswari 2014). Thus, television provides the diasporic population with the possibility of navigating seamlessly through diverse worlds to create a “placeless culture” (Meyrowitz 1986). It is assumed that television dramas contribute significantly to the creation of “hybrid audiences” who are already interested in different cultures and who constantly engage in dialogue with their self-identities and cultural belongings. Television dramas create an environment in which audiences can explore and understand different cultures, values, and beliefs. The participants’ comments in my interviews suggest that this

allows viewers to gain a better understanding of their own culture and identity, as well as those of others, and to engage in meaningful dialogue that can lead to greater understanding and acceptance. This can contribute to the cosmopolitan universe where different cultures, values, and beliefs are embraced and interrelated.

“Cultural hybridity” (Burke 2009), defined as a product of the encounter of different cultures, refers to the fusion of different cultures (syncretic culture), a “polyphonic” and “dialogical” cultural environment. Transnational cultural encounters in the global media culture – where cultural diversity and difference are essential – take different forms as the common feelings that audiences share against them (Bondebjerg 2020).

Arguing that the identity is not fixed but fluid, Stuart Hall (1997) established media as a powerful tool in the construction of transcultural identities. He viewed cinema as a form of representation that can constitute the audience as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable them to discover new places and new spaces. Hall’s ideas apply to television dramas as well. Via television dramas, audiences may learn about cultures they are unfamiliar with. Their encounter with the new cultural element contributes to intercultural communication in different dimensions. Related to these points mentioned above, in the interviews I asked the participants how we can interpret the encounters between Nordic and Turkish culture in everyday life routines within the context of intercultural communication. I also asked if they believe Turkish dramas contribute to these cultural encounters and if they could make a comparison between Turkey as depicted on TV dramas and Turkey in everyday life encounters.

In the cosmopolitan cultural universe, which is very much related to cultural hybridity, the imagination of the viewer is shaped through transnational cultural encounters. In Ulf Hannerz’s (1990: 239) famous words, cosmopolitan culture is: “A willingness to engage with the Other”. It entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences and a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. Cosmopolitanism as an ‘openness to the world’ is related to the idea of identity as a symbolic project (Thompson 1995), a way of being and becoming (Hall 1996). Cosmopolitanism is an identity that is developed in particular contexts and expressed in different ways to suit particular purposes and, crucially, can be examined empirically by the reception and ethnographic approaches (Ong 2009: 454).

Ulf Hannerz (2007) speaks of an “ethnography of cosmopolitanism” that examines diasporic culture and deals with

cosmopolitan culture in relation to multiculturalism and cultural diversity. At the core of cosmopolitanism is a series of tensions that enable and disable it (Ong 2009). This research employs the reception of Turkish TV series in Sweden within the framework of “cosmopolitanism ethnography” and trace the tensions between closeness and distance, global and local, ‘us’ and ‘them’, universals and particulars in the experiences of the audience.

In this research, which synthesizes the perspective of “ethnography of cosmopolitanism” with “audience ethnography”, field research reveals how it becomes more possible for the audience to be open to interactions with new cultural forms while at the same time maintaining their commitment to the cultural forms they are familiar with. The defining characteristic of the “ethnography of cosmopolitanism” is its ability to document the multiplicity and intersectionality of the various representations and interactions through media, travel, and daily encounters that shape the subject’s multicultural experience. In the field research, interview questions were included to determine the cultural flexibility of the participants and the level of multiculturalism present in their own lives. The objective was to understand the correlation between their interest in various cultures, their everyday life routines, family structure, and their perspectives on cultural diversity. Concerning this point, in the interviews, the participants are asked questions such as how often they travel abroad, whether they encounter people from different cultural backgrounds other than their own, if they have people from different ethnic origins in their family and close circle, etc.

## 2. HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIELD: INTERVIEWS WITH AUDIENCES, BLOGGERS, SVT AND ECCO RIGHTS OFFICIALS

The highlights from the fieldwork in this article is based on fourteen interviews with the viewers of Turkish TV drama series in Sweden<sup>6</sup> and with the executives of SVT and the distribution company Ecco Rights.<sup>7</sup> Field research that started in the beginning of 2022 is continuing and expected to be com-

pleted with approximately thirty participants until February 2023. The Swedish audiences that vary by ethnicity, gender, age, and occupation are recruited via online advertisements and snowballing (Marcus et al. 2017). In-depth interviews that contained open-ended, semi-structured interview questions lasted approximately one hour and were all conducted in English. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2013) has been used to analyze the data gathered from the interviews. Because the field sites can be multi-sited, digital, or in hybrid forms between the digital and the non-digital (Mortensen 2020), the field in this research is organized considering the preferences of the participants. The interviews are held both in-person and online. Most of the participants preferred online interviews: Seven participants are interviewed online and six are interviewed face-to-face in cafes and workplaces. Their ages range from 27–69 years. The occupations of the audience participants are housewife, nurse, businesswoman, public service worker, entrepreneur, factory worker, academic, financial advisor, and store employee. The nationalities of the audience participants span a large spectrum: German, Spanish, Finnish, Kurdish, Turkish, Syriac, Latvian, Greek and Swedish. The executives who I interviewed gave informed consent for their names to be used. To protect the anonymity of other interviewed audience, pseudonyms compatible with their ethnic origins are used. A short project briefing and interview questions were sent to all participants before the interview, along with the ethical statement.

6 Of the eleven audiences I interviewed, three of them are Swedish bloggers who have been writing about Turkish dramas.

7 I conducted three interviews with the executives of SVT and the distribution company Ecco Rights: Fredrik af Malmborg, Managing director of Ecco Rights (22.02.2022, Zoom); Magdalena Löfström, Then Acquisitions Executive of SVT (23.05.2022, In-person) and Göran Danesten, Then Acquisitions Executive of SVT (22.11.2022, In-person).

Number of The Interview	Name/pseudonym of the interviewees	Brief information about the interviewee	Time and type of the interview
1	<b>Fredrik af Malmborg</b>	Managing director of Echo Rights, an international copyrights company based in Stockholm	22.04.2022-Online (Zoom)
2	<b>Magdalena Löfström</b>	Then Acquisitions Executive of SVT	23.05.2022-In person. Radio Sverige
3	<b>Göran Danasten</b>	Then Head of Fiction at the acquisitions department of SVT	22.11.2022-In person. SVT Drama
4	<b>Helen</b>	63 years old. Mother. German. Academician. Lives in Sweden, Stockholm for 23 years. Her partner is from Argentina.	24.05.2022- In person. Cafe
5	<b>Jose</b>	27 years old. Spanish. Phd student. Lives in Stockholm for 3 years. His father is from Argentina. His partner is from Greece.	20.06.2022-In person. Cafe.
6	<b>Maria</b>	40. Swedish. Mother. Born and raised in Gothenburg. Lives in Gothenburg. Married to a Turkish man. Works at a factory. Has a University education.	29.06.2022-Online (Messenger)
7	<b>Karin</b>	69. Finnish. Retired. Mother. Her ex-husband was from Germany. She lives in Stockholm for 46 years. Her son is married to a Brazilian. She has a blog where she writes about Turkish dramas.	5.07.2022-In person. Cafe
8	<b>Anna</b>	Half Finnish (mother side) Swedish. 53 years old. Living with her two cats. She has a Turkish boyfriend who lives in Turkey. Born and raised in Sweden. Now she lives in a town in Northern Sweden. She started her own business. She is an entrepreneur now.	7.07.2022-Online (Zoom)
9	<b>Annika</b>	Half Turkish (father side) Swedish. Mother. Divorced. Lives in Stockholm. 54 years old. Works in public service.	7.06.2022- Online (Zoom)
10	<b>Melanija</b>	She is 37. Latvian. Her mother is Polish. Her father is Russian. She is married to a Lebanese. They have been living in Sweden for 7 years in a village near Norrköping. She has three kids. She had a Russian and Polish ethnic shop. Her husband has a business in Mersin, Turkey at the moment. Her brother is married to a Brazilian girl.	18.07.2022- Online (Messenger)
11	<b>Evangelina</b>	53. Greek origin. Born and raised in Sweden. Divorced. Head Hunter. Mother. Her ex-husband was born in Romania and grew up in Canada and moved to Sweden in his early 20s. She wrote about Turkish dramas on her blog.	22.07.2022- Online (Zoom)
12	<b>Maya</b>	She lives in Linköping. 28 years old. Her mother comes from Turkey. Her father is from Iran. She was born and raised in Sweden. She is a nurse. She didn't complete her university education. She wrote about Turkish dramas on her blog	22.07.2022-Online (Zoom)
13	<b>Gabriel</b>	He is 22. Born and raised in Stockholm. He is a Syriac. His parents migrated from Midyat. He graduated from high school. Works at a second hand store. He is living with his parents.	15.11.2022-In person. Workplace
14	<b>Zeynep</b>	She is 33. Born and raised in Stockholm. Her parents are from Konya, Kulu. She is single. Works at a cafe.	25.11.2022-In person. Cafe

#### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERVIEWS AND PARTICIPANTS

## 2.1. The process of reaching out people and persuading them to participate in interviews

The process of recruiting interview participants posed several challenges. First, I needed to find a way to reach Swedish audiences. Where could I meet them? Secondly, once I had located and met them, I needed to persuade them to participate in my research. And the third thing, would I be able to make interviews with all the Swedish audience in English? Would the language become a problem? These were the main obstacles I had to overcome in the field.

In the beginning, I tried to meet people and invite them to my research through in-person encounters in everyday life. For example, when the bank employee at the branch where I opened a bank account learned that I was from Turkey, she said that her mother loved Turkish TV series. The employee at the second-hand store where I shopped said that his family had migrated from Midyat and he watches Turkish TV series with their whole family. When the cashier at an H&M store learned that I was Turkish, she smiled and said that she watches Turkish TV series. Similar things happened several times in supermarkets, bus stops, shoe stores, and other places where I had the opportunity to start conversations. However, when

it came to inviting them to participate in my research, they were a bit shy and not very open to the idea. During my interviews with the manager of the copyright company Ecco Rights and the acquisition executive of SVT television, I asked for their recommendations to find and meet Swedish audiences. They advised me to participate in some fan groups on social media and shared some links to these groups. I then searched for additional social media groups where I could announce my research and invite people to participate. I found several Facebook groups and joined them.

The audience I have interviewed so far has largely consisted of members of these groups<sup>8</sup> and fans of Turkish TV series. I aim to reach a wider variety of audiences, including middle-aged and older women of Nordic origin and audience groups belonging to the Turkish diaspora, by using

<sup>8</sup> In my preliminary search of these groups, I observed that most of the members were Northern European women (from countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Latvia). As the project progresses, I will conduct a detailed content analysis of the group members and their posts to determine:

- The distribution of group members by nationality, age, and gender
- The motivations and preferences of the audience, as revealed by their posts and their engagement with Turkish series
- Whether there are any other Facebook pages or fan groups for Swedish audiences interested in other TV series.

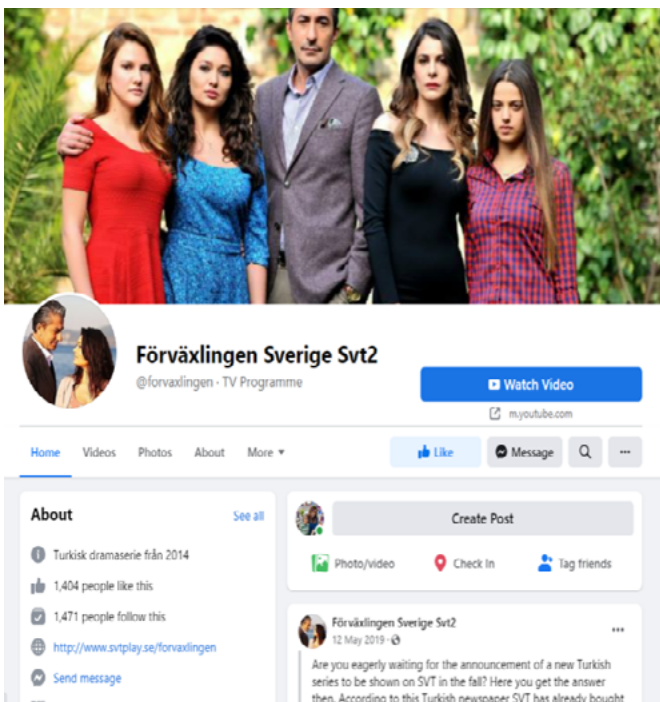


IMAGE 1. SWEDISH FACEBOOK FAN PAGE OF ONE OF THE TURKISH SERIALS BROADCAST ON SVT

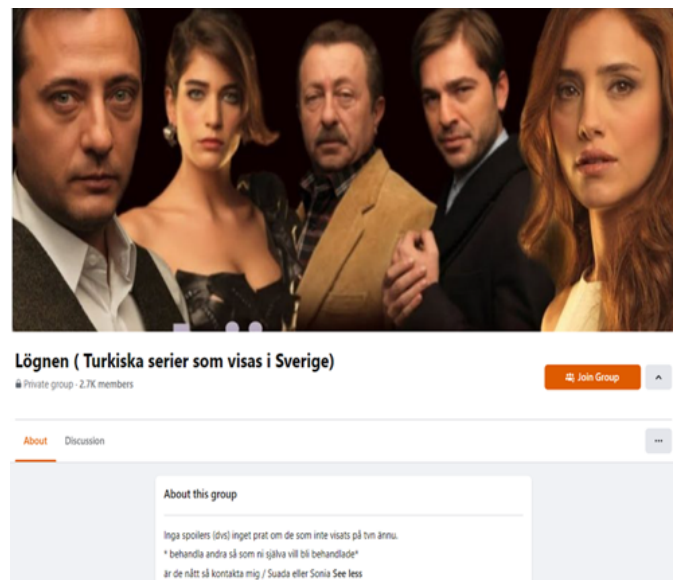


IMAGE 2 THE END (2012, 2013) WAS THE FIRST TURKISH SERIES SHOWED ON SVT. IT HAD A FAN PAGE ON FACEBOOK WITH MORE THAN 2000 MEMBERS





IMAGE 3. ONE OF THE "CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS" ANNOUNCEMENTS ON A FACEBOOK GROUP PAGE

different sources such as: WhatsApp groups of Turkish diaspora in Sweden; announcements on various internet forums; and email groups to reach audiences of Nordic descent etc. A sample of the announcements I sent to one of the social media groups can be seen in the image 3 above.

I had the opportunity to meet more people through social media groups and it was easier to find interviewees this way. I was able to make more progress in my fieldwork. Most of them were eager to participate in online interviews. Below is a sample of the announcements I sent to one of the social media groups:

To overcome the potential language barrier during the interviews, I took several steps:

- I offered participants the option of answering the interview questions in writing in Swedish prior to the interview, if they needed to.
- I enrolled in SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) classes to improve my Swedish language skills. This allows me to use some Swedish expressions during the interviews and clarify points in Swedish if necessary.

## 2.2. Highlights from the interviews

### 2.2.1. Encounters, Connections and Attachments of the Swedish Audiences and Bloggers

Based on the early findings of the ongoing interviews, it is possible to say the following about the Swedish audience of Turkish TV series interviewed:

- They travel frequently.
- They are curious about different cultures.
- They have multicultural families.
- They live in multicultural circles.
- Most of them are middle-aged or older women who like reading novels.
- They are well-educated.
- They are working moms or retired women.
- Most of them have been to Turkey before.
- Most of them want to visit Turkey again.
- Some of them would like to live in Turkey for longer periods.
- They are loyal audiences and give feedback about their favorite Turkish dramas.

On their empirical research on the Moroccan, Russian and Turkish diaspora in Germany, Andreas Hepp et. al. (2012) developed the concept of "mediatized migrants" to underline the communicative connectivity of the migrants and their media culture. Extending the concept of the "connected migrant" to that of the "mediatized migrant", they focus on the comprehensive communicative connectivity and various possibilities for maintaining their previous communicative relationships with their place or country of origin (Hepp et.al. 2011: 1-4). To build up new communicative relations in their present living context, in terms of the Swedish audiences who have cultural and historical ties with Turkey, watching Turkish dramas gives them the space to be in contact with a geography they have witnessed from afar but with which they have also developed a sense of belonging. Through my daily interactions with individuals from migrant backgrounds, I encountered several Turkish drama viewers and had the opportunity to conduct interviews or casual conversations with them. Gabriel – a Syriac<sup>9</sup> young man who works at a second-hand store, with whom I had the chance for a quick interview – told me that because he grew up watching Turkish series, and because his parents were constantly watching them, he couldn't escape from these series. It turned into an interest and habit to watch them. His parents had moved to Turkey when they were young. He is familiar with Turkish culture and the way of life in Turkey. He was born and raised in Stockholm and

9 Syriacs (or Aramaens, a Christian minority originally from Turkey, Syria and Iraq, but scattered around the world) are one of the largest groups of immigrants in Södertälje, Stockholm. The first families arrived in the 1960s as refugees from Turkey and settled as workers for the factories in the area (Scania, in particular). As many immigrants do, the Syriacs followed the pattern of familiar links, tending to settle close to each other. See more: <https://www.nousngo.eu/en/our-stories/evs-lorenzo-interview-integration-and-extremism-in-sweden/>

has never been to Turkey. Despite this, he feels as though he has experienced life in Turkey through watching Turkish TV series. During our conversation at a patisserie about her viewing habits, Zeynep told me that she was a fan of Turkish dramas, even though she didn't have much time to watch them. She said she liked the fact that Turkish series were popular among the people around her, as it provided a contrast to the negative news often associated with Turkey.

As seen in the below table, the comments from different individuals about Turkish dramas focus on the following themes such as scenery, representation of the reality, unpredictable plots, language, music, duration, and the portrayal of women's empowerment. The *scenery* and environment depicted in Turkish dramas is a major factor that appeals to viewers. The presence of exotic locations and unique architecture seems to be a major attraction for viewers, with some even feeling a sense of familiarity with the places they see on screen. The *representation of reality* in Turkish dramas is also highly valued by viewers. Many of them mention how the stories and characters are "real" and reflect the "real life" of people. The *unpredictability* of Turkish dramas is another aspect that viewers enjoy. The fact that viewers don't know what will happen next keeps them engaged and invested in the story. The *storytelling* in Turkish dramas is highly praised by viewers. The stories are described as containing a range of emotions and experiences and are likened to real life issues. The *traditional culture* depicted in Turkish dramas is valued by some viewers, who appreciate the respect given to older people in these shows. The *acting* in Turkish dramas is also praised, with some viewers finding the men from the Middle East particularly attractive. The *language* used in Turkish dramas is admired by some viewers, who find the language to be expressive and emotional. "Because I want to learn Turkish I prefer Turkish dramas, to listen to their original soundtrack. I watch them with Swedish subtitles. The emotion given by the language is very similar to Greek. More passionate, more vivid" says Evangeline. Similar comments come from the other participants. They also underline how it is necessary and meaningful for them to watch Turkish Dramas with Swedish subtitles. Maria explains why she prefers SVT to watch Turkish dramas in these words: "We didn't have Netflix before. On YouTube not all the Turkish series had English or Swedish subtitles. To have Swedish subtitles made it attractive for me to watch". The *music* in Turkish dramas is also highly regarded. Some viewers even use Shazam to identify and save the songs they hear on the show. The duration of a Turkish drama is seen by some viewers as a measure of

its quality. Long-running shows are seen as being high quality, while shorter shows are dismissed as lacking in interest. Finally, viewers appreciate how the female characters are portrayed in both their weakness and strength, just as in real life, which they find *empowering*.

In addition to the "dominant readings" or positive responses from viewers, some participants approached Turkish dramas critically. My interviews also brought to light potential drawbacks and problematic aspects of these shows. My informants perceive Turkish dramas as depicting a skewed reality that portrays wealthy and luxurious lifestyles. Some also mention that the shows normalize physical violence and reinforce gender stereotypes. Others point out the exaggeration and spectacle in the acting and the censorship of certain topics, such as homosexuality. One viewer pointed out that the portrayal of violence, particularly against women, is not acceptable in Sweden and suggested that this is a form of normalization in the shows. Another viewer noted the *lack of representation* of male characters regarding domestic responsibilities and roles. She criticizes exaggerated portrayal of women with full makeup, suggesting that these are *stereotypical* gender roles. Additionally, some viewers found the *exaggeration* of certain elements in Turkish dramas to be off-putting. The acting, in particular, was described as over-the-top and similar to Spanish soap operas. Finally, the issue of *censorship* in Turkish dramas of certain topics such as homosexuality was also raised by some viewers, who felt uncomfortable with the lack of diversity and the suppression of certain topics and characters. That was seen as problematic and potentially damaging to their interest in the shows. Some interviewees express discomfort with the lack of diversity and the gender discrimination portrayed in the series. Making a comparison between Nordic and Turkish dramas Maria says: "Nordic Dramas are a lot more open. They are full of strong and happy women. We can see gay characters as well. Women take the front roles you cannot see in Turkish Dramas. Even if they have a leading role, they are always having huge troubles. Strong wife and mother but always with troubles."

**Positive Audience Outputs/Dominant Readings**

**Scenery:**

"You see the environment in Turkish Dramas. That's what most of the Swedish people like about them, I think. We like traveling and seeing different places... I see Galata Tower on the screen and feel familiar. 'Ah, I saw there' I say." (Anna, 7 July).

**Representation of Reality:**

"They're real. The stories are real. They show the real life of people" (Maya, 22 July).

"Very clear messages it gives especially against violence at home. Modernity and pre-modernity exist in the same society, women are very suppressed in the countryside. Clashes in a society. Polarizations can be seen on the series. And we see the troubles it causes in people's lives" (Helen, 24 May).

**Unpredictableness:**

"Turkish dramas are not predictable. You don't know what happens next. And it's the atmosphere in the series I love" (Anna, 7 July).

**Storytelling:**

"I love the stories. I am impressed by the stories. I like the people, the scenes but most of all the stories. It contains everything: pain, joy, laughter, and drama. Just like in real life." (Evangeline, 22 July).

**Traditional culture:**

"The elderly people are respected so much in Turkish dramas. In Sweden, elderly people don't have respect from younger people. Kids should be kids and they should respect adults" (Melanija, 17 July).

**Acting:**

"I always find men from the Middle East very attractive. I love a little bit darker men. I always found them very handsome. Exoticness is the point. I love dark hair so much" (Maria, 29 June).

**Language:**

"I love the Turkish language. How many words you have for love. An extremely broad emotional language. Love and anger are expressed with an extremely broad vocabulary in Turkish. That's why I love Turkish music as well. I love the feeling of it. Underlined meaning of the words. Swedish is very flat. We have a couple of words to say I love you. But not in that way like in Turkish." (Maria, 29 June).

**Music:**

"And the music is perfect. I shazam most of the music in Turkish Dramas." (Melanija, 17 July).

**Duration:**

"If a drama has so many seasons it means it is high quality. But if it has only one or two seasons it means it didn't get any interest. I don't watch them." (Melanija, 17 July).

**Women's empowerment:**

"My mom worked so hard for us. And I do the same for my daughters. In dramas we see both. In *Paramparça*, Dilara, the rich woman, she is very strong, but we see very weak women too. But real life is full of conflicts. Women are weak sometimes, and sometimes they get stronger. Turkish dramas show how women do anything for their families. Any woman from anywhere in the world would do the same things for their kids" (Evangeline, 22 July).

**Oppositional/Negotiated Audience Reviews**

**Representation of reality**

"If you watch this kind of series, you maybe think that all people in Turkey are rich and live in beautiful houses and have a lovely life, materially" (Karin, 5 Jul).

**Normalization:**

"In a series, the elder brother slaps her sister in the face shouting 'why are you late.' In Sweden, it is never acceptable. This way it normalizes physical violence. It is very clear that all discussions end with what the men say. Women can always have an opinion, but it is not always followed. Stereotypes of women and men are normalized" (Maria, 29 June).

**Stereotypes:**

"But women often stay at home and their husbands go to work. You never really know what the men are doing at work, most of all, they seem to sit and talk with other people, if there is a sequence of work life in the drama... We never see men cooking in the series. The women are always with full makeup. When men are working you never know what they are doing. If they're not policemen" (Karin, 5 Jul).

**Exaggeration:**

"Everything is a little bit extra, pushing a little bit to the edge in Turkish dramas. A little bit spectacular, especially by means of acting. Just like Spanish soap operas" (Annika, 7 July).

**Censorship:**

"Governmental censorship makes me feel a bit critical about my interest in Turkish dramas. Once there was a tv series that was canceled from the beginning because it had a homosexual character in it even if it wasn't central in the story. To what extent should I be interested in Turkish dramas if it is strictly controlled? It causes a lack of comfort for me. It's problematic to see low levels of diversity in dramas." (Jose, 20 June).

**Gender Discrimination:**

"Always weak women who need men. Men are always rich. I don't want my daughter to grow up in Turkey. Women have no rights in Turkey like they have in Sweden. Even I love Turkey and feel at home in Turkey" (Maria, 29 June).

The results of my detailed google search show that, after the broadcasting of Turkish Dramas in 2013, 10 Swedish bloggers have started to write about Turkish dramas in their blogs.

Until recently three of the bloggers have been interviewed. The details of the blogs can be seen in the table below:

	Address of the blog/date of the blog post	Highlights from the blog posts
1	<a href="https://mustybasol.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/turkisk-serier/">https://mustybasol.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/turkisk-serier/</a> 01.07.14	"I'm very happy to be able to watch '20 Minutes'. It is not that good series... But I will develop my Swedish with this series. Because they speak Turkish and there is Swedish subtitle."
2	<a href="https://vikingkiz.blogg.se/2016/november/forvaxlingen-paramparca.html">https://vikingkiz.blogg.se/2016/november/forvaxlingen-paramparca.html</a> 21.11.2016	"An exciting series full of intrigue that keeps you glued. My mother is completely hooked and has slavishly followed every episode from the beginning. A total of 100 episodes are shown. All episodes can be followed on SVT play."
3	<a href="https://somagaligis.blogg.se/2013/june/turkiska-serier.html">https://somagaligis.blogg.se/2013/june/turkiska-serier.html</a> 06.06.2013	"Right now I'm sitting on the couch at home watching a Turkish series called "20 Dakika" with mom and great-grandmother."
4	perfektpensionar <a href="https://perfektpensionar.bloggo.nu/about/">https://perfektpensionar.bloggo.nu/about/</a> 23. 04. 2021	"Yesterday I happened to read in DN about Turkish series whose recipe for success is based on strong emotions and often deals with current issues such as family values, religion and class. Today's Turkish series has developed into its own genre which goes by the name 'dizi' (a word that means series in Turkish)."
5	<a href="https://threedirection.wordpress.com/2014/08/28/turkiska-serier/">https://threedirection.wordpress.com/2014/08/28/turkiska-serier/</a> 28.02.2014	"I know that many have prejudices against the Turkish series but they are super good."
6	<a href="https://lyckogummi.blogg.se/2015/march/turkiska-serier-2.html">https://lyckogummi.blogg.se/2015/march/turkiska-serier-2.html</a> 02.05. 2015	"I love my Turkish series and had planned to share two of them."
7	<a href="http://speciellaa.blogspot.com/2013/01/jag-foljer-en-turkisk-serie.html">http://speciellaa.blogspot.com/2013/01/jag-foljer-en-turkisk-serie.html</a> 18. 01. 2013	"It came mostly by chance that I got stuck in front of the premiere episode of the Turkish series "The lie" as it is called in Swedish."
8	<a href="https://www.devote.se/linataha/helg-30910563">https://www.devote.se/linataha/helg-30910563</a> No date	"I watched a lot of Turkish series before but lost it completely later because you don't have time for everything. I could watch series all night, cry to the Turkish series and live it."
9	<a href="https://blogg.improveme.se/imanaldebe/2014/04/21/den-turkiska-dokusapan-har-bidragit-till-kvinnors-frigorelse-i-mellanostern/">https://blogg.improveme.se/imanaldebe/2014/04/21/den-turkiska-dokusapan-har-bidragit-till-kvinnors-frigorelse-i-mellanostern/</a> 21.04.2014	"What was unique about Turkish series was their Western way of life and that the viewers still recognized themselves in the characters as they still lived in tradition-bound lives."
10	<a href="https://daniellaibis.com/2016/09/28/alltsa-den-har-turkiska-serien/">https://daniellaibis.com/2016/09/28/alltsa-den-har-turkiska-serien/</a> 28.09.2016	"Turkish series are really good, have seen a few pieces, including one called "A Thousand and One Nights". Just like in that series, the plot is super good, the people are so good-looking, and the music."

As seen in the above table, bloggers' posts on Turkish dramas are all constructed around their positive reviews about their favorite Turkish dramas, apart from the first one who says the series is not very good but good enough to learn the language. Apart from that male blogger, the interviews with other bloggers and the information gathered from the blogs show that the bloggers are women of middle-age or older, who have ties or closeness with Turkey or Turkish culture:

"I had a Turkish friend ten years ago. She was a very nice person. Also, in my work life I encountered a Turkish lady as well" (Karin, 5 July 2022).

"Because I want to learn Turkish I prefer Turkish dramas, to listen to their original soundtrack. I watch them with Swedish subtitles. The emotion given by the language is very similar to Greek. More passionate, more vivid" (Evangeline, 22 July 2022).

"I watch Turkish dramas with my mom. I need to improve my mother tongue. I cannot speak proper Turkish, but I understand. That's why I watch Turkish dramas" (Maya, 27 July 2022).

Even though she has criticisms of Turkey's political situation in general, and Turkish dramas do not change her reservations about Turkey, Karin says that TV dramas have contributed greatly to her impressions of Turkey:

"I don't think about visiting Turkey even though my interest in Turkey increased after the dramas... Politically it is not a nice country today. Otherwise, I would love to see somewhere there" (Karin, 5 July 2022).

"I learned about that beautiful bridge in Istanbul. That's something I learned. Whenever I see that bridge I say, 'It is Istanbul'. I was thinking people were very poor everywhere in Turkey. After I saw the dramas, I saw the differences" (Karin, 5 July 2022).

These interpretations demonstrate the influence of various encounters on the formation of images in the mind of the viewer. These encounters may include personal interactions, media content, and media practices. In other words, TV series are not the only factor that shapes the audience perceptions and understanding of cultural phenomena. The

audience draws on information from sources such as the news, political debates, and their own experiences, which all contribute to the way we construct our understanding of the world through different media representations.

### 2.2.2 Interviews with the Executives of SVT and Eccho Rights

The executives of both SVT and Eccho Rights pointed out that the success of Turkish series can be attributed to the high quality of production, the strong storylines, and the fact that the stories are relatable to viewers from all parts of the world. They also mentioned that the Turkish series succeeded in Sweden because there was a demand for some new content in the Swedish market, and that the series appealed to a wide range of viewers, from young to old. Furthermore, the executives noted that the availability of the content online made it easier for viewers to access the series, and that the content was marketed well in Sweden, which further increased its popularity. Finally, they highlighted that the success of Turkish series in Sweden can be attributed to the fact that they were able to capture the emotions of the viewers, and that the characters were relatable and likable.

#### *How Turkish Dramas Appeared on SVT? The Beginning of the Story:*

"Deepest value for dramas for me is we enter different people's lives, step into the minds of characters. If a drama is well done it is more effective than documentaries, to make people understand the state of the world we live in.

From the other perspective, we must simplify things in order to cope with a super complex world. If someone has a prejudice against a certain culture, the dramas may also add something more to that as well" (Göran Danasten, 22 November 2022).

Göran Danasten is one of the key figures behind the journey of Turkish dramas in Sweden. During his time at the company, SVT made the decision to buy the first Turkish TV series from Eccho Rights, a Sweden-based copyrights company. The beginning of the story in his own words:

"When I was walking around outside I used to speak to many people from different backgrounds, investigating what we were missing, wondering why they

were not satisfied with what we presented. What they were saying was ‘we don’t really watch SVT, we don’t really watch British series’. The story was that I was on parental leave, spending a lot of time outdoors, noticing all the parabolic antennas on balconies and roofs around the neighborhood. That made me reflect on whether SVT felt relevant to everybody. Did we lack something?

Over time, I started to dig deeper into other markets, doing research, speaking with a lot of people in the business, learning more about what ‘worked’ in other territories, watching a lot of shows – different from the Anglo-American and Scandinavian output we are so used to. I wanted to explore other expressions, other ways of making TV drama, perhaps having the ability to make our slate more diverse and complete. Our team started to look into everything from South American telenovelas, to South-Korean dramas, to romantic European fiction, to Syrian Ramadan soaps. And more.” (Göran Danasten, 22 November 2022).

Danasten says he understood early that Turkish dramas played an important role in, for instance, Southeastern Europe and further East. After more research and a lot of screening, he decided it might be worth a try. However, the challenge when trying to add something ‘different’ was that they shouldn’t be ‘too different’. They, as SVT, had to find some sort of middle ground. Speaking with Eccho Rights managing director Fredrik af Malmberg, who has a deeper insight into the market in question, helped a lot. One day, they started to discuss trying something from Turkey. Another challenge was how to adapt the format of a Turkish series, with longer episodes, into a broadcast schedule. They cut the long episodes into thirty minutes shorter episodes which was more proper both for the target audiences and broadcasting schedule of SVT. *Son* (2013) was something very much Turkish but still possible for the Swedish audience to relate to. It was an alternative to what they were usually doing, to their usual broadcasts: “Those days broadcasting was more linear, and we aired Turkish series at 7.30 at SVT2 against the big News Show. It was a sort of challenge. The series gained momentum and became popular,” Danasten adds.

#### **Create a Habit:**

Danasten pointed out that the Scandinavian audience, specifically the Swedish audience, is rooted in psychological realism

and naturalistic, realistic storytelling. He said that they are naturally afraid of emotions. Turkish dramas offer a relaxed attitude towards emotions, letting themselves be full of emotions: rage, happiness, strong love, sadness. He added that it was scary for Swedish audiences and something that should never be offered to a Scandinavian producer:

“‘Hold your emotions’ and Turkish dramas are full of it, you know. Experiencing strong emotions is fulfilled by Turkish dramas. That was one need to be fulfilled. You can create a habit over time, love the characters. Because there are so many episodes.” (Göran Danasten, 22 November 2022).

#### **Dedicated Audience, Loyal Audience, Niche Audience:**

In our interview, Fredrik af Malmberg explained that Turkish dramas have gained popularity among various audiences in Europe, including Spain and Sweden. While Turkish immigrant populations may be among the primary viewers of these dramas, they are not the only ones. In fact, af Malmberg noted that Turkish immigrants are more likely to watch Turkish dramas on Turkish TV channels or platforms such as Netflix, rather than on European channels. He also pointed out that, although Turkish dramas have not had the same level of success in Sweden as they have in Spain, they do have a dedicated audience there. He attributes this, in part, to the fact that these dramas offer a unique and diverse portrayal of a Muslim country, which is appealing to many viewers:

“Because the only thing we hear about the Muslim world is, you know, from Iran or Arabic countries. Turkey shows some nuances through dramas even though they are full of stereotypes and moral values... They are often about rich and poor which is a universal theme but also gender roles are very different from what Swedish people are familiar with. Men are very strong, women are very weak, but there are also strong mother characters. All these varieties add a dimension to stereotype Western storytelling. Turkish drama characters are much more diverse when we compare them with cliché characters who are good or bad in western dramas. We see the transformation of characters much more in Turkish dramas. Also, Turkish dramas take family issues seriously. Western dramas generally take family issues in sitcom or comedy format” (Fredrik af Malmberg, 21 April 2022).

Swedish national channel SVT's then acquisitions executive Magdalena Löfström<sup>10</sup> made similar points and said that "Turkish dramas are affordable; it did not cost too much for SVT. It was not a super success, but at the same time Turkish dramas always had a very loyal audience". Also, she talked about how much feedback they got from the audience:

"After we first broadcasted *Lie (Son)* we had so many emails from Swedish middle-aged women. We had quite a lot of feedback... After the '70s so many Turkish immigrants came to Sweden. So, we were expecting their interest as well. Swedish older women keep the culture very vivid. They have an interest in different cultures. They were writing emails to us. To have good feedback is very unusual. Normally people give feedback when they are angry with something. But Turkish dramas had so much positive feedback and we never experienced this again ever after. We don't really get emails like this..." (Magdalena Löfström, 23 May 2022).

While Malmberg uses the expression "dedicated audience" and Löfström says it as "loyal audience", Danasten expresses something similar with "niche",<sup>11</sup> sharing his insights about the success of Turkish drama series in Sweden:

"My most favorite dramas are – one is Argentinian, one is Italian, from the United States, UK and Germany. Consumers don't care about nations. If they want strong emotions, they watch Turkish dramas, or South American stuff. What makes Turkish dramas a super strong market is niche. Otherwise, other countries also produce high quality dramas with strong emotions." (Göran Danasten, 22 November 2022).

SVT's then head of the fiction department, Göran Danasten, mentions how audiences were sharing their reflections and giving so much feedback from his personal experience. He says his mother and all her friends are Turkish series fans:

"What started out as a wish to reach an audience that was not watching SVT became something partly different. This new thing also turned out to appeal to a Swedish audience... Those days broadcasting was more linear, and we aired Turkish series at 7.30 at SVT2 against the big News Show. It was a sort of challenge. The series gained momentum and became popular. My mother loves them. She calls me whenever a Turkish series ends. She calls me asking 'do you know what the next Turkish series will be?'" (Göran Danasten, 22 November 2022).

### **Representation Issues:**

Löfström emphasized that Turkish dramas often have both problematic and strong representations of women within the same narrative. However, she also noted the high production quality of these series:

"...We sometimes see issues which are out of the question in our lives. For instance, in a series a woman was being forced to marry her rapist. In Turkish dramas women are more like in Sweden. They are more equal...Glamorous sceneries, emotions, luxury in the Turkish dramas. Better than telenovelas." (Magdalena Löfström, 23 May 2022).

Gender representations and the image of Turkey through the dramas were mentioned by Malmberg as well:

"Dramas are not propaganda movies, they are entertainment. When the audiences watch bad characters and problems, they don't think bad about Turkey, I think.... Representation of Turkish men who are very caring, responsive, moral, passionate, and emotional is not very much like in real life maybe. They cry for 7 minutes. Maybe they are not properly represented but it is a fiction not a documentary" (Fredrik af Malmberg, 21 April 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

The motivation for this research was the long-standing presence of Turkish TV series on Swedish state television, which led me to ask the question: Why has Sweden, rather than Germany or Denmark, become a key market in the Baltic Sea

10 SVT is the first and only TV channel of Sweden that broadcasts Turkish dramas since 2013. It was Magdalena Löfström's time when SVT drama department decided to buy Turkish dramas from Echo Rights.

11 Niche is a specialized segment of the market for a particular kind of product or service. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/niche>

region for these series? This question served as the starting point for my research, which has focused on exploring the reasons behind this phenomenon.

The findings of current research suggest that the Swedish audience for Turkish TV series is composed of individuals who frequently travel, are curious about different cultures, and have multicultural backgrounds. Most of the interviewees are middle-aged or older women who enjoy reading novels, are well-educated, and are either working mothers or retired. Many of them have visited Turkey before and express a desire to do so again, with some even considering living there for longer periods. These viewers are loyal and actively provide feedback on their favorite Turkish dramas. Overall, this audience appears to have a strong interest in and connection to Turkish culture.

During the interviews, almost all of the interviewees shared their opinions that Turkish TV series are not at all similar to the productions of other countries. There is no doubt that this has a share in the global interest in Turkish TV series. In her profile of Turkish television series for the *Guardian* Fatima Bhutto argues that Turkish dramas are “powered by narratives that pit traditional values and principles against the emotional and spiritual corruption of the modern world” (2019). Family values are common issues in both Korean and Turkish dramas who are both rising players in the TV series industry. What makes their stories? Not sexuality, just pure and platonic love, a Cinderella, a dangerous outsider, class conflict without socio-political references, crime and punishment are the basis of their stories. There is a tendency to call Turkish dramas “dizi” because they are a “genre in progress” (Öztürkmen 2022). They are not soap operas (Anglo-American style melodramas, like *Dallas*, *EastEnders*, *The Young and The Restless*, *The Bold and the Beautiful*), or telenovelas (Latin America style, like *Los ricos también lloran* (“The rich also cry” Zenginler de Ağlar), or period dramas (historical dramas such as *Downton Abbey*): They are dizi. As oral historian Arzu Öztürkmen declares, they make a genre with unique narratives, use of space and musical scores.<sup>12</sup>

None of my interviewees, including SVT and Echo Rights officials, identified Turkish TV series as a distinct genre or showed any tendency to call them “dizi”. However, they did note that there is a characteristic of the storytelling in these series that sets them apart from other genres. During my field research, it has become apparent that the audience tends to

be highly committed to specific genres of TV series. Göran Danasten, an official at SVT, mentioned in an interview that the audience for Turkish TV series tends to be a niche audience, distinct from those who typically watch telenovelas, Korean dramas, or Nordic dramas. This suggests that the audience’s engagement with Turkish TV series may be relatively distinct from their engagement with other types of dramas.

As the primary goal of this research is to understand the global interest in Turkish TV series by examining the characteristics of the Swedish audience’s relationship with these shows, I conducted interviews with officials from SVT and Echo Rights, bloggers with an interest in Turkish dramas, and Swedish audiences from different ethnic backgrounds. These interviews allowed me to explore the potential influences of the Swedes’ experiences of traveling and exposure to different cultures, their understanding of democratic values and human rights, their sensitivity to gender equality, and their curiosity about the “cultural other” on their interest in Turkish TV series. For viewers who watch Turkish TV series on SVT, these shows have become a daily routine, almost like a habit. Some viewers have developed a strong attachment to these series, even expressing a fondness for the Turkish language. These series have been airing at the same time approximately every day for 10 years, and for some viewers, they have become a constant presence in their daily lives.

The Swedish audience’s interest in Turkish TV series appears to be driven by a variety of factors, including the scenic locations depicted in the series, the sense that the stories are grounded in reality, the unpredictability of the storylines, the traditional cultural values depicted, the attractiveness of the actors, the emotional depth of the Turkish language and music, the high production quality, the depiction of women’s empowerment and family dynamics, the normalization of certain gender roles and stereotypes, and the exaggeration of certain elements for dramatic effect. However, some viewers also expressed concern about the normalization of physical violence and the influence of government censorship on the content of these series. Overall, Turkish TV series seem to offer a unique and captivating blend of elements that appeal to the Swedish audience.

During my fieldwork on the reception of Turkish TV series in Sweden, I discovered that Swedish viewers of Slavic and East European origin have quite different ways of relating to Turkish TV series. These forms of relationship were particularly evident in how they considered traditional values which are overemphasized in Turkish dramas. This made me think that audience studies focusing on East European countries

12 <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2019/sep/13/turkish-tv-magnificent-century-dizi-taking-over-world>



and Slavic audiences are very important and necessary. In addition, I believe that there is further need for comprehensive and comparative research on the reception of Turkish TV series by the audience in different areas that have not been studied yet. I hope that the transnational flow of Turkish series will continue to be explored and discussed with new questions and diverse research from different fields.

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## TV Series

*The End* (2012, 2013)

*20 Minutes* (2013)

*Broken Pieces* (2014-2017)

*Brave and Beautiful* (2016, 2017)

*Mother* (2016, 2017)

*The Red Room* (2020-2022)



# SOCIAL CLASS, TV SERIES AND RESISTANCE: THE RECEPTION OF TURKISH DRAMAS BY GREEKS

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## KEYWORDS

Reception; resistance; social classes; transnational soap operas; Greece.

## ABSTRACT

Turkey has a leading role on the international media scene as far as the export of serial dramas is concerned. Turkish soap operas represent the preoccupations of poor persons

and their (mis)adventures following their encounter with wealthy people. They thus combine the representation of the lifestyle of the wealthy classes with messages that, at the same time, criticize it and validate the lifestyle of the working-classes. Since the economic crisis, Greece is among the countries that systematically import Turkish soap operas. Through this article, the author analyzes how Greek audiences negotiate the power relations imposed on them by the capitalist system through the viewing of Turkish television soap operas. This research has revealed that the resistance of meaning receivers toward the hegemonic system is not always opposed to the media text.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the production and exportation of Turkish soap operas is in constant development. First diffused in countries that were under the influence of the ancient Ottoman Empire (which means the Balkans and the Middle East), Turkish soap operas have attracted heterogeneous audiences fairly quickly, accrediting to the Turkish serial industry a leading role on the international media scene. The transnational success of Turkish soap operas has motivated many researchers to study the impact of these productions on local audiences as well as their importance in a geopolitical perspective (Yanik, 2009, Salamandra, 2012, Kaynak, 2015, Constantinou and Tziarras 2018; Vitrinel 2019, Algan and Kaptan 2021, Larochelle 2019, 2021, 2022).

Relational and love problems as well as conflicts between people of different socio-economic status are the favorite themes of these soap operas. More precisely, by focusing on the daily life of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, Turkish soap operas represent the preoccupations of individuals belonging to the working-classes as well as their (mis) adventures following their encounter with wealthy people. Turkish soap operas thus combine the representation of the lifestyle of the wealthy classes with messages that, at the same time, criticize it and validate the lifestyle of the working-classes. In this context, Turkish soap operas allow viewers both to observe the lifestyle of people with affluent backgrounds and to view their values, habits and lifestyles valorized.

Greece is one of the countries that systematically import Turkish soap operas. Turkish soap operas have been broadcast in Greece since 2004<sup>1</sup>. However, the importation of Turkish soap operas from the neighboring country has been intensified during the period of the economic crisis. During this period, local production in Greece has significantly diminished creating a fertile environment for the growth of Turkish soap opera consumption (Moore 2013). Through this article, I aim to analyze how Greek audiences negotiate the power relations imposed on them by the capitalist system through the viewing of Turkish television soap operas. The results presented in this article are based on fifty in-depth

1 *Yabancı Damat* is the first Turkish soap opera ever to have been aired by a Greek television channel (Mega Channel) in 2004, whose plot revolves around the “forbidden” love between a Greek man and a Turkish woman. This soap opera enjoyed great success in terms of audience ratings (Koukoutsaki-Monnier and Vovou 2007) initiating the importation of Turkish soap operas to the Greek television market which was to be intensified during the economic crisis.

interviews with individuals (especially women<sup>2</sup>) of various socio-economic backgrounds residing in different geographical areas in Greece<sup>3</sup> aged from 17 to 89 years old. Interviewees were recruited on a voluntary basis and through the snowball method. The thematic areas discussed during the interviews were as varied as the representation of gendered identities, of love and marital relations, of Turkish society, of social classes, etc. In addition, I analyzed the social class representations projected by Turkish soap operas diffused in Greece. In the following pages, I first consider a brief summary of social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas. I then present the results of my empirical research on the reception of Turkish soap operas by Greek audiences.

## 2. THE “VIRTUE OF POVERTY” AND THE TURKISH DREAM

### 2.1. The stereotypes of “rich but unhappy and dishonest” and “poor but happy and honest”

TV series quite often project negative representations of wealthy people while at the same time they depict disadvantaged people with positive attributes. These representations are based on well-established stereotypes within contemporary Western societies that legitimize existing social inequalities. More precisely, low social and economic status becomes much more tolerable when the person who possesses it believes that those at the top of the social and economic hierarchy are not happy in ways analogous to their income (Lane 1959). In this sense, Western societies have established a cliché according to which economically disadvantaged people, or those with a lower status in the social hierarchy, receive a certain number of gratifications inaccessible to people belonging to the upper classes of society. Thus, the common perception persists that disadvantaged people are “happy in their own way”, carefree, able to enjoy the “simple pleasures” of life and so on (Kay and Jost, 2003).

2 The vast majority of the participants were women. More precisely, among the fifty interviewees there were only three men. This over-representation of women is consistent with related literature observations about the “female” characterization of serial fiction, whether in terms of choice of subjects, type of narration or audience profile (Ang 1989; Geraghty 1991; Brown 1994; Blumenthal 1997; Brunsdon 2000; Hobson 2003).

3 Athens, Thessaloniki, Chalcis, Komotini.

The presumed inverse relationship between satisfaction and standards of living has been the object of study for several researchers in the humanities and social sciences who have analyzed the social and psychological functions of stereotypes attributed to the rich and disadvantaged (Lane 1959, Lerner 1977, 1980, Hunyady 1998, Jost et al. 2001, Kay and Jost 2003, Oldmeadow and Fiske 2007, Jost et al. 2011; Crossley and Polytechnic 2012). Stereotypes of the *poor but honest and happy* and *rich but dishonest and unhappy* not only help the disadvantaged feel better about their status (Lane 1959, Lerner 1980, Jost et al. 2011), but they also contribute to increase the perception that society is fair and that inequality is legitimate, in the sense that each class gets what it deserves (Kay and Jost 2003). Thus, although these stereotypes are belied by reality<sup>4</sup>, they are often mobilized to legitimize social injustice. More precisely, the illusion that society is fair is in reality a defense mechanism mobilized by individuals within an unpredictable, uncontrollable and unjust world. Living in such a world would be unbearable without the perception that everyone deserves their suffering (Lerner 1977, 1980, Furnham and Gunter 1984, Dion and Dion 1987).

This phenomenon is intrinsically linked to the socialization process of social subjects (Lerner 1977, 1980). The socialization process of children dictates that they should hold back their immediate impulses and invest in practices that lead to long-term outcomes. In this context, children develop a contract whereby they hold back their immediate impulses and work to maximize their long-term rewards. In exchange, the child expects results that are supposed to be earned, since he/she has complied with the terms of this contract and has invested in achieving important and rewarding goals. In this context, the child learns that his/her world is a space where additional investments lead to better outcomes that are “earned” and that this way he/she will get what he/she desires. In this sense, the principle that one “deserves the results of one’s actions” is integral to the dominant socialization process (Lerner et al. 1976).

In this context, TV series quite often attribute virtues such as happiness and morality to individuals belonging to disadvantaged social groups, while at the same time they attribute unhealthy behaviors and negative situations such as unhappiness, loneliness or dishonesty to advantaged people. Thus, the “virtue of poverty” - that is, the stereotypes that the *poor are honest and happy* and the *rich dishonest and un-*

*happy* - functions as an ideology to justify the prevailing social system: the one who has everything materially is socially dispossessed and the one who has nothing is actually happy.

Through these representations, the ordinary power relations are reversed. In these serial fictions, success is not prescribed in terms of material possessions and power is not held by the economically and socially successful, but it is reserved for the less fortunate. Series such as *Columbo* are characteristic examples of the power relations reversal through TV series (Mathieu 2013). The interest of this serial lies not in solving the crime<sup>5</sup> but in the way the modest<sup>6</sup> detective Columbo - son of immigrants and visibly from a working-class background - will solve the murder and will thus prove not only that there is no perfect murder, but also that everyone is finally equal in front of justice. In this context, successful and often arrogant rich people are going to be unmasked by an unrefined but modest and intelligent lieutenant.

## 2.2. Social class representations through Turkish soap operas

The encounter of working-class individuals with wealthy people is generally a popular theme in Turkish soap operas. A good number of the soap operas projected in Greece such as *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?* (*What is Fatmagül's crime?* 2010-2012), *Kara Sevda* (*Dark Love* 2015-2017), *Kuzey Güney* (*North South* 2011-2013), *Kara Para Aşk* (*Black Money Love* 2014-2015), *Fazilet Hanım ve Kızları* (*Mrs. Fazilet and Her Daughters* 2017-2018), etc. deal not only with love problems, but also with the encounter of people with different socioeconomic status. In these soap operas, wealthy individuals are usually portrayed as villains and are attributed with negative behaviors, such as arrogance, meanness or dishonesty. On the other hand, working-class individuals are usually represented in a positive way and are attributed with attitudes, such as honesty, modesty or kindness. There is one exception to this common narrative pattern in cases where a character from a modest background may behave badly. However, this is always due to the fact that this person has been “corrupted” by money and the affluent lifestyle. Thus, although these secondary characters often regret it afterwards and return to the “modest but moral” way of life, Turkish soap operas show the harmful consequences of the pursuit of money in the lives of poor people.

4 Many individuals in Western societies still lack access to basic human rights (e.g., health care, education, etc.) because of their socio-economic status.

5 The murderer is known from the first scene of each episode.

6 The modest origin of the lieutenant is detected not only by his modest clothes but also through his manners or even his unrefined food tastes.

On this point, it should be noted that wealthy people may be economically powerful but this power has most often been granted to them either in a hereditary or in an illegal way. In this context, very often the characters from privileged backgrounds are portrayed not only as villains, but also as immature, quite lazy, selfish and arrogant. In opposition, people from disadvantaged backgrounds are rather mature, hardworking and modest. Thus, quite frequently, characters initially deprived of wealth, manage - thanks to their virtues - to acquire economic power and finally reach the top of the social hierarchy. In a society marked by increasing inequality, such a representation is a way of rendering justice in a ruthlessly unjust and unequal world. If the initially powerless person reached a privileged position in the social hierarchy, it is because this person respected the socialization contract according to which everyone “deserves the results of their actions” and thus not only worked hard but also remained modest. If, on the other hand, a wealthy person has lost everything he/she owned, it is because he/she acquired power without working for it and because he/she was arrogant and mean. The world of Turkish soap operas is thus marked by the “Turkish dream”. Anyone can succeed if he/she works hard and stays humble.

Thus, it does not matter how economically powerful the wealthy person is: at the end of the story, the ordinary man from a modest background who has remained humble and good will always be the “winner”, in the battle with the wealthy person(s). While the viewers witness throughout the story the misadventures of the ordinary man - usually due to the intrigues set up by the rich - in the end, the ordinary man succeeds in defeating his enemy and therefore, justice is rendered. The world proposed by Turkish soap operas may not be without injustices<sup>7</sup>, but in the end the wealthy characters are represented as subject to the same treatment and rules as the less fortunate. Although they are economically powerful, they are not invulnerable, since in the end they are punished for their mistakes.

People with economic power may have succeeded professionally but it seems that they have not succeeded within the private sphere. Rich families are not represented without problems. Family rivalries, tensions, infidelity or toxic behaviors are some of the problems that are common among the wealthy. However, these problems do not always seem to concern people from disadvantaged families where love

7 Quite often Turkish soap operas depict the corruption of the social system in Turkey and the many ways in which wealthy people take advantage of it.

and solidarity prevail. In this context, it seems that while the disadvantaged are deprived of economic power, they are socially powerful.

It thus becomes clear that happiness in Turkish soap operas is described by the preoccupations of the popular classes. The success of the poor but honest, the punishment of the wealthy but evil, and the non-priority of economic power and instead the emphasis on personal happiness, seem to be the constitutive elements of the world proposed by Turkish soap operas. It is a world - in contrast to the real world - that is fair and in which everyone finally receives in one way or another what they deserve.

On this point, it is worth mentioning that the lifestyle of the wealthy represents a “Westernized” way of life that is far from the traditional one. On the contrary, the lifestyle of the working classes embodies the traditional way of life. This is evident not only by the food and clothing choices of the characters, but also by the relationship the characters maintain with the family hierarchy and/or religion. In this context, practices such as taking off one’s shoes when entering the house, praying often or drinking tea (or more rarely raki<sup>8</sup>) are habits that are anchored in the traditional Turkish way of life and maintained by people from working-class backgrounds. On the other hand, dressing in a “modern” way, drinking coffee (or sometimes wine/whisky<sup>9</sup>) or maintaining a number of practices that reflect a lifestyle far removed from tradition (e.g., going to nightclubs, having premarital sex<sup>10</sup>, etc.) are “Westernized” habits practiced by the elites. In this context, the positive representation of the popular classes whose way of life is in accordance with tradition and the “demonization” of the elites who have adopted the “Western” way of life, is in line with the vision of Turkishness promoted by the government currently in power in Turkey. This vision of Turkishness is influenced by traditional norms and a morality based more and more on Islamic values (Larochelle 2019).

Finally, Turkish soap operas are marked by the spectacularization of rich people’s lives. The affluent and their behavior may provoke irritation. However, their lifestyle is an aspect that invites viewers to get acquainted with a milieu

8 A habit reserved for male characters in particular.

9 Although the representation of alcohol consumption is prohibited by RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council), rich individuals and/or villains are often depicted drinking alcohol. However, glasses containing alcohol are always blurred.

10 On this point, it is worth noting that it is always the rich individuals or characters that are attributed negative behaviors who engage in premarital sex. When a poor and/or good person makes the “mistake” of having sex outside the institution of marriage, that person is most often portrayed as the “victim” of the rich person.



they have probably never frequented and thus to escape into an unknown world. The world of the rich thus becomes a side-show that particularly affects women (Dyer, 1973). Luxury cars, beautiful villas on the Bosphorus or extravagant dresses and jewelry are omnipresent elements in Turkish soap operas.

### 3. THE RECEPTION OF SOCIAL CLASS REPRESENTATIONS BY GREEK AUDIENCES

Before presenting the results of my survey, it is necessary to briefly present the analytical framework in which my findings will be presented. Taking under consideration the theories on media reception and resistance (Fiske 1987, 1989, 1992, 1998, Buckingham 1987, Morley 1992, Condit 1994, Ang 1996, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, Schröder 2000), I should note that in my analysis, I consider resistant readings to be the reactions of the audience, which not only escape or oppose the dominant meanings of the soap opera (Fiske's evasive and semiotic resistance), but also manifest an awareness and a conscient deliberation on behalf of the viewer (Schröder 2000). Moreover, the reader of this article should take into consideration that as Jenkins (1992) has noted, readers are not always resistant<sup>11</sup> and not all resistant readings are necessarily progressive readings as social subjects do not always recognize their conditions of alienation and/or subordination.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that despite the importance of Stuart Hall's "encoding/decoding" model (Hall 1980), I will not apply it to the presentation of my results for reasons that have already been discussed by several scholars. More precisely, many researchers doing empirical surveys have pointed out the rigidity of Hall's "dominant/negotiated/oppositional" decoding typology and the inadequacy of these categorizations when the researcher is faced with the reality of the field (Morley 1980, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). Furthermore, Hall's concept of "preferred reading" also seems problematic as even in the case of non-fictional texts, the identification of a single preferred reading is epistemologically dubious and presupposes the absolute objectivity and neutrality of the analyst (Schröder 2000). Moreover, the analysis of the reception of non-hegemonic texts according to the model proposed by Hall would be very complex. Given

11 Not all women who participated in my survey proposed resistant readings. However, the great majority did. In this section I focus only on women who through their reading of the texts discussed during the interview resisted to the hierarchies imposed by the capitalist system.

these elements mentioned above, I chose to analyze my results under the prism of resistance rather than applying the "encoding/decoding" model. Thus, among the 50 individuals interviewed during my survey, 21 people consciously and deliberately associated their viewing of Turkish soap operas with the rejection of the norms imposed by the capitalist system.

#### 3.1. Turkish soap operas and Greek audiences: between legitimization of the capitalist system and social criticism

An important number of the individuals who participated in my survey interpreted Turkish soap operas through the prism of social class conflict. To be more accurate, they put the emphasis on the conflictual relations between wealthy characters and those without economic power. Thus, some of the interviewees rejected the social class representations proposed by Turkish soap operas (semiotic resistance). For those who rejected these representations, Turkish soap operas are tools used by the dominant class in order to legitimize and thus perpetuate unequal social relations. Through this type of reading, the interviewees oppose the unequal power relations and the exploitation of the dominated by the dominant.

Some of the interviewees were not only opposed to the representations of social classes but they also identified in them an ideological intention. In other words, they considered that Turkish soap operas are tools used by the dominant to "fool" the dominated and thus legitimize their exploitation. Aware of the fact that the production process of these soap operas is controlled by the elites and is therefore ideologically conditioned, the interviewees perceive Turkish soap operas as propagandist means of the capitalist system aiming to impose its ideology on people lacking economic power. In this context, the opposition of social subjects to these representations constitutes an act of contestation of the capitalist system.

Although several interviewees rejected the social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas, some identified an intention for social criticism through the narratives conveyed by these series. Such an example is that of a 60-year-old housewife who, in regard to the melodramatic soap opera *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?*, states:

In *Fatmagül* they showed something that happens in every society. The rich escape justice and it is the

poor who pay the price. It has always been like this; it is not something new or something that is unique in Turkey. Corruption exists everywhere. The rich remain unaffected and it is always the poor who pay the price. Turkish (series) show and criticize this phenomenon (interview conducted in 2016, Athens - Greece).

Similarly, a 17-year-old woman who is high-school student, said:

These series show very well the great social inequalities that exist in Turkey. They show the poor who are starving and living in misery and the extremely wealthy who have everything. The rich have the power to do whatever they want and also get whatever they want without always using ethical means. So, Turkish series show and denounce corruption. (Interview conducted in 2018, Chalcis – Greece)

Thus, many respondents have identified, through the representation of unequal power relationships, a desire to represent in a realistic way the injustice that characterizes contemporary societies. In a world marked by social inequality, Turkish soap operas reflect reality by depicting the suffering imposed on the dominated by the dominant. Furthermore, some of the interviewees identified through these texts the intention not only to realistically represent the injustice of contemporary societies, but also to *criticize* this phenomenon. Thus, for these people, Turkish soap operas are counter-hegemonic texts that represent and criticize the reality of capitalist societies. By adhering to these texts, the people in question not only affirm their ideology, but also challenge through their viewing activity a profoundly unjust world, where the attribution of justice depends on the existing power relations and where the poor are exploited by the economically powerful.

### 3.2. The appropriation of gender representations through the prism of social classes

Some interviewees attempted to make a connection between the representation of gendered identities and social class. One such example was a 28-year-old woman who works as art conservator-restorer. She noted the different representation of women from affluent and working-class background,

and she also associated women's social status with their submission (or not) to the power relations prescribed by the patriarchal system. Specifically, she explained:

In *Anne (Mother 2016-2017)* they show two completely different worlds. On the one hand, there was the mother with the three daughters who belonged to the high society...such a woman you cannot intimidate her easily because she belongs to the high society, because she is a lawyer...there you cannot manipulate or intimidate her easily; but when we talk about Şule<sup>12</sup>, a simple and ordinary woman, on the one hand she will not accept intimidation because she is wild but on the other hand you can easily manipulate her. Turkish series show different worlds and therefore different women. In Turkey there are two worlds. When a woman understands that she can't do anything, she starts doing things indirectly because she also wants to survive. She also wants to succeed, she wants not to be punched, not to be abused, not to be killed... she wants to do something. Do you know how many days she stays hungry because she said something her husband didn't like? In this case, she too must act differently. In this case, we have the evil element and we see the evil Turkish woman but we don't know if she is actually responsible for what is happening or not (interview conducted in 2018, Athens - Greece).

Similarly, a 52-year-old teacher declared:

There is a major difference between women who represent the urban and European way of life and women who represent a more traditional way of life even if they live in a big city. (...) On the one hand, there are those who are very rich with big cars, swimming pools, villas and on the other, there are the poor and ordinary people who live in small houses. Poor women are always veiled... (...) poor women are more traditional while rich women are often more dynamic and educated. Rich women are more emancipated (...). Interview conducted in 2016, Athens – Greece.

12 Central female character.

These interview extracts are representative of the reading of gender representations made by some of the women interviewed during my survey. The socio-economic status of female characters seems to be, according to some of the interviewees, at the origin of female submission (or not) to the male domination within the patriarchal and capitalist society. In this context, according to the interviewees, the “poor” are by definition more vulnerable to intimidation and manipulation. Yet, poor female characters do not appear to be without agency. These women, despite being poor, want to succeed and act against their oppression. Thus, several interviewees spotted through the figure of the “evil” woman a tactic put in place by poor women aiming to challenge male domination. However, it should be noted that this is not a tactic used by women in general. It is a tactic used by “simple and ordinary” women who do not belong to the “high society” and lack economic resources, but still want to survive. The contestation of the patriarchal system is thus an affair of the ordinary women from the working-classes. In opposition to women from affluent backgrounds, who are by definition protected from men by their economic resources and status<sup>13</sup>, poor women mobilize their agency to survive in a male-controlled world where they are subjected to violence and manipulation. This victory of women against the patriarchal system and male domination is thus a *victory from below*, that is, by ordinary women. In this context, the women interviewed not only celebrate the victory of women over male domination, but also celebrate the victory of ordinary people over the unequal power relations imposed on them. Thus, by adhering to these representations, they challenge the patriarchal system, but also the capitalist system that dictates the subordination and exploitation of the “poor”.

### 3.3. The victory of the ordinary men and the symbolic redistribution of power

Some of the individuals who participated in my survey identified a pedagogical intention on behalf of the meaning producers. This pedagogical intention consists of two elements: 1) money does not guarantee happiness and 2) individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, cannot escape justice.

More precisely, as mentioned above, in Turkish soap operas poor people are subjected to several difficulties because of those who hold economic power and therefore respected social status. In this context, the punishment of the rich peo-

ple in the course of the story is of major importance. This element ensures that the poor and the rich are subjected to the same rules. Whether they are beautiful or rich, women in Turkish soap operas are subject to the same rules as the viewers. The world in Turkish soap operas is profoundly fair and unlike real life, no one can escape justice, regardless of one’s social status. Turkish soap operas thus grant justice, but not just any justice. It is the “justice of the poor”. While in real life the poor “pay the price” of social injustice, in Turkish soap operas the rich are no longer sheltered from the judicial institution.

The individuals interviewed seem to particularly appreciate the role of the poor in this process. Specifically, regarding the soap *opera Fatmagül’ün Suçu Ne?*, a 55-year-old housewife states:

Look, the other three guys<sup>14</sup> wouldn’t have committed this crime if they hadn’t been drinking that night... of course they regretted their action. What was it that kept them from moving forward? It was money. It (the soap opera) wanted to show us that money could cover everything, but Kerim’s<sup>15</sup> so-called mother, who was poor and a decent woman, did not allow it. (...) In *Fatmagül*, how a girl suffers and why the law should be on her side, but in the end, she is even accused. (...) It was a rape and they all had to be punished, even the parents who with their money covered up the crimes of their children. This kind of thing happens in Turkey... if they rape you, it’s your fault and you have to marry your rapist. In *Fatmagül*, the rich forced her to marry Kerim to cover up the act of their rich children while Kerim who was poor was victimized even though he had not actually raped the girl.<sup>16</sup> (Interview conducted in 2018, Athens – Greece).

13 According to women who participated in my survey.

14 She refers to the rich men who participated in the rape of the young woman.

15 The male character who participated in the rape of the young woman and comes from a modest background.

16 One narrative element of this soap opera that is quite important to note is the definition of rape. While the four men assaulted Fatmagül, the three (the rich ones) performed the sexual act while Kerim (the man from a modest background) did not. While he was the one who caught Fatmagül, and he witnessed her being raped by his friends, in the end he could not perform the sexual act. Rape is thus represented as an act that is defined exclusively by the penetration of the male sex into the female body. The protagonist’s complicity in this crime is thus minimized. This and other narrative elements contribute to the “legitimization” of the rape suffered by the young woman (Larochelle, 2017).

Through this statement, the interviewee addresses an element that proves to be of fundamental importance. A distinction is made between Kerim's adoptive mother (Ebe Nine), who is "poor" but also "a decent woman", and the parents of the three rich men who "with their money covered up the crimes of their children". Here, the woman interviewed does not simply oppose the value system of people from working-class backgrounds to that of privileged people. She also refers to the crimes committed by rich people and their intention (and ability) to cover them with their money. Moreover, she refers to the struggle of the disadvantaged to obtain justice. They may be poor but they are "right" and do not let injustice go unpunished. The figure of Ebe Nine thus represents the resistance of the poor against the corruption of the rich. If justice is rendered in Turkish soap operas, it is because an ordinary person, from popular background, leads a fight against the powerful and thanks to his strength, his determination, his honesty and his intellectual abilities manages to get justice.

The viewers thus not only witness the process of rendering justice but also the victory of the ordinary man. In this context, the symbolic struggle between the social classes is transformed into a struggle for justice. At the end of this struggle, it is not those who possess capital who win, but those who, although subjected to injustices, have remained fair and humble. Therefore, Turkish soap operas are, for some of the interviewees, counter-hegemonic texts because of their denunciation of the crimes committed by the rich, but also because during this struggle for justice described above, they are on the side of the poor. The poor are thus the "winners" at the end of each story. It is them, and not the (often corrupted) judicial and/or police institutions, who restore justice. In Turkish soap operas the poor who are "correct" manage to condemn the corrupted rich. The world of Turkish soap operas is thus characterized by an *inversion of power*: it is the poor who hold real power and not the rich. In this context, for some of the interviewees, it seems that adhering to the narratives proposed by Turkish soap operas is not only a way of challenging the existing power relations but also a means of *redistributing power* symbolically.

### 3.4. Reversing pleasure and redefinition of happiness

Some of the subjects interviewed associate to their viewing activity a *reversing pleasure*. I define as reversing pleasure *the pleasure derived from the inversion of the established social*

*order and which eventually may lead to the contestation of the current power relations*. One such example of the reversing pleasure is the following declaration of a 19-year-old man who is a university student:

It pleases me when the rich people suffer too. I like that they are not invulnerable. (...) The series project an ideal way of life. The rich have everything they want, cars, beautiful houses... but they show that the rich also suffer, that they are like us and that, although they are rich, they also have problems (Interview conducted in 2016, Athens – Greece).

This interview extract is representative of the fact that some of the individuals interviewed satisfy themselves by looking at representations that question the invulnerability of privileged people. Here the young man explicitly states that his pleasure is not only due to the victory of the ordinary man but also to the fact that the rich are also vulnerable to suffering and pain. Thus, some of the interviewees take pleasure by viewing people who, although they have everything the viewers may not have (e.g., a wealthy lifestyle, expensive cars, nice houses, etc.), are just like them.

There are thus two widespread dimensions that characterize the pleasure that social subjects associate with their viewing activity. The first dimension is that of *reassurance*. Specifically, some of the interviewees take satisfaction in observing that the rich also have problems in their lives as they also do. The second dimension of pleasure consists in a *redefinition of happiness* operated through Turkish soap operas.

The economic crisis had a deep impact on the lives of many Greeks who have seen their socioeconomic status change very quickly and who continue to suffer the consequences of this turbulent period. In this context, the representations of Turkish soap operas function as sources of reassurance for the subjects interviewed as some of them feel better about their own status by observing the suffering of the rich through Turkish soap operas.

By adhering to texts that question the omnipotence and the invulnerability of the rich and by taking pleasure by their suffering, some interviewees challenge existing power relations as they redefine happiness through their viewing. If happiness is no longer defined on the basis of material possessions and economic power, power in society is no longer held by those who are economically successful but by those who are satisfied with their status. The redefinition of happiness that takes place through the viewing of Turkish soap operas

grants power to the working classes who, within the capitalist system, are deprived of it. Some of the viewers interviewed seize this opportunity provided by these texts and question the established social order through their viewing.

The redefinition of happiness has been an aspect addressed by several individuals during my research. Happiness, which within capitalist societies is defined to a large extent by economic success and the possession of material goods, in the world of soap operas is defined according to the concerns of the poor. In this sense, a 53-year-old beautician, in reference to the soap opera *Gümüş* (*Silver* 2005-2007), said:

She was modest. She never wanted to be rich and lead a luxurious life. He wanted to own boats. She coveted his love and made him understand that with the simplest things we can be happy. She made him appreciate the simplest things. She taught him modesty. She made him understand the importance of things that cannot be paid for, like love. (...) He became modest too and I liked that a lot. He understood what really matters in life. This series taught me to be happy with simple and ordinary things. It is a series that has reconciled me with reality. (Interview conducted in 2016, Athens – Greece)

Through these words of my interviewee, it becomes clear that the victory of the ordinary man does not only consist in the victory in the process of attributing justice. It is also a symbolic victory since it is the worldview of the poor, their values and concerns that serve as the basis for the definition of happiness in the frame of Turkish soap operas. Thus, through her reading of the soap opera *Gümüş*, the woman interviewed celebrates the victory of the poor, whose concerns are not only valued and appreciated, but they also serve as the basis on which happiness is defined. Turkish soap operas deal with the social conflict between the rich and the poor. As a result of the conflict between the two worldviews, the world of ordinary, modest men prevailed and served as the basis for the definition of happiness.

Therefore, the social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas challenge the hegemonic (capitalist) system according to which happiness is intrinsically related to consumption. Thus, the woman interviewed by adhering to these soap operas, adhere to texts that convey her ideology. However, this ideology was not always that of the interviewee. If the media text in question led her to reconcile herself with reality, it is because before viewing it, she

was suffering from her status and financial situation. In fact, her “suffering” was induced by the economic crisis. In this context, through the viewing of Turkish soap operas - and in particular of the soap opera *Gümüş* - the interviewee has reconciled herself with reality. This reconciliation due to the series consists in the fact that, like the protagonist of this soap opera, she understood that the things that matter in reality cannot be bought. It is the redefinition of happiness proposed by the Turkish soap operas that has reconciled some of the viewers with reality.

In this context, the emancipatory dimension of Turkish soap operas consists in allowing members of the working classes to cope with the feeling of insufficiency felt in relation to their status but also to redefine on a new basis the notion of happiness. If happiness defined within capitalist society in terms of economic success and material possessions seems unattainable, happiness as proposed by Turkish soap operas constitutes an accessible alternative for those deprived of economic capital.

However, we should consider to what extent these representations constitute a hegemonic strategy to legitimize and reconcile the dominated with the hegemonic system. If the hegemonic system imposes the subordination of the poor to the economically powerful and the exploitation of the dominated by the dominant, to what extent does this reconciliation of the interviewees with their situation prevent them from making claims in real life? If the respondents oppose the norms imposed by the hegemonic system and challenge the system in question at a symbolic level, to what extent do they do so in reality? Without information about how viewers challenge the dominant system in their actual daily lives, any attempt to answer this question would be speculative. However, it should be emphasized that we have taken into consideration the fact that, if for some subjects these representations have an emancipatory dimension, for others they are likely to contribute to reconciling them with the hegemonic system.

### 3.5. *Libido cognoscendi* and abolition of barriers between social classes

Turkish soap operas propose a utopian world which, although characterized by the omnipresence of material goods and luxurious lifestyles, accords great importance to the values and concerns of the working classes. Within this context, viewers can satisfy their *libido cognoscendi* (thirst for knowledge)<sup>17</sup>

17 See in this sense François Jost (2011).

for a universe that is unknown to them and which is characterized by the abundance of expensive goods and luxurious lifestyles. However, at the same time they can also see their concerns and worldviews valorized. Thus, by escaping into the imaginary world offered by Turkish soap operas, Greek fans can both experience a different milieu and at the same time challenge it. In this context, a 43-year-old woman who works as head chef said:

What I liked about this series<sup>18</sup> was the predominance of feelings. There were values, romance, love, trust. They show that you can't buy everything with money. All the feelings were there. Hate, abandonment, revenge, romance. How to explain... they focus on the human being (...) I also liked to look at the villas, the clothes, the cars... you know to see a bit of how the rich live (she laughs). One reason I was watching *Aşk-ı Memnu* (*The Forbidden Love* 2008-2010) was to see the house...the furniture, the rooms, all of it. And Bihter's<sup>19</sup> clothes too. Ah, even her robes were particular. I loved her clothes! (Interview conducted in 2016, Athens - Greece).

The interviewees watch Turkish soap operas "to see a bit of how the rich live" but also because they are products that "show that you can't buy everything with money" and that "focus on the human being". This statement - which may seem contradictory at first - is representative of the double function of Turkish soap operas: 1) the importance accorded on the concerns and lifestyle of the working-classes and 2) the satisfaction derived from the "secondary show".

Specifically, some of the interviewees initially take pleasure in escaping into a world characterized by the valorization of their concerns and the victory of the ordinary people. Thus, by escaping from reality through these texts, social subjects escape momentarily from the control of the hegemonic system (capitalist system) and the norms imposed by it. However, the pleasure of the interviewees does not end there. Through the viewing of Turkish soap operas, viewers can also discover an environment that they cannot know in real life. In this sense, apart from the primary show offered by the text and which constitutes the first aspect of pleasure for the viewers (e.g., love story, revenge, victory of the ordinary man, etc.) there is also a second form of show. This second

form of entertainment - which particularly affects the female characters - is also a major source of pleasure. Extravagant dresses, fine jewelry but also luxurious villas are some of the elements that compose this secondary show. In this context, the viewers interviewed do not only challenge the dominant system by escaping into an imaginary world that valorizes feelings instead of money, but they also satisfy their curiosity.

Turkish soap operas offer a secondary show but also a utopian world characterized by the abolition of traditional barriers between social classes. While in the real-world people from the working-classes have very few opportunities to get to know and exchange with wealthy people, the world of Turkish soap operas is characterized by increased social mobility. Love plays a prominent role in this process as a vehicle for social mobility. In this sense, the archetype of Cinderella constitutes one of the major features of the utopia proposed by the Turkish soap operas. In that respect, it is not only the secondary show that makes the social subjects escape from reality but also the story of Romeo and Juliet. If the real world is characterized by the perpetuation of social inequalities and limited social mobility, the storyline of Romeo and Juliet offers an alternative where love almost always wins over social inequalities. This archetype that defies the barriers between social classes also functions as a source of pleasure for many of the interviewees.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Through this article, I examined how Greek viewers negotiate the power relations imposed on them by the capitalist system through the viewing of Turkish soap operas. A fairly large proportion of the interviewees (21 individuals) proposed a contesting reading of the social class representations projected through Turkish soap operas.

Nevertheless, on this point, I must underline an important element: not all readings are resistant, since a significant part of the respondents (29 people) did not contest through their readings the dominant hierarchies imposed by the capitalist system. However, the purpose of this article is to highlight the complexity of resistance in the reception process and the ways this resistance occurs through the reading of complex texts such as Turkish soap operas. For these reasons, through this article I have chosen to focus on the resistance of the fans of these soap operas without considering that all the interviewed subjects are critical, resistant and capable of subverting the ideology introduced in the texts by the dominant elite.

18 She refers to the soap opera *Kara Sevda*.

19 Central female character of the soap opera *Aşk-ı Memnu*.

This empirical research revealed that meaning receivers' resistance to the hegemonic system is not always opposed to the media text. It should be noted that I do not claim that this contestation necessarily results in political action. Still, it is important to mention that the contestation of existing power relations by Greek viewers of Turkish soap operas shows that, as Michel Foucault pointed out, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 2010/1976: 125). In other words, existing power relations are constantly negotiated. The meanings given by the interviewees to the narratives they consume constitute one facet of their protest activity, which operates first (and perhaps foremost) at a symbolic level.

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## TV Series

- Anne (2016-2017)  
Aşk-ı Memnu (2008-2010)  
Columbo (1986 – 2003)  
Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne? (2010-2012)  
Fazilet Hanım ve Kızları (2017-2018)  
Gümüş (2005-2007)  
Kara Para Aşk (2014-2015)  
Kara Sevda (2015-2017)  
Kuzey Güney (2011-2013)  
Yabancı Damat (2004 – 2007)



# A TURKISH DRAMA IN THE LAND OF TELENOVELAS: THE RECEPTION OF *FATMAGUL* IN BRAZIL

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## KEYWORDS

Brazil; Turkish TV dramas; *Fatmagul*; melodrama; audiences

## ABSTRACT

In 2015, Brazilian free-to-air television network Band started to air Turkish TV dramas. *Fatmagul*, the second Turkish drama aired by Band, achieved considerably high audience ratings and engaged audiences online, drawing attention to the emerging phenomenon of Turkish TV dramas. In this work, I rely on discussions about melodrama and transnational media flows to investigate Brazilian viewers' perceptions of *Fatmagul*. More specifically, I aim

to understand how this foreign narrative is related to the context of Brazilian audiences' daily lives and identify the differences and similarities Brazilian audiences see between Turkish and Brazilian productions regarding the narrative content. To gather data on the audience profile and general preferences, I shared an online questionnaire on groups about *Fatmagul* on Facebook. Among the respondents, I selected five female viewers from varied backgrounds and conducted in-depth interviews. The results point out that viewers relate to the melodramatic structure and moral of *Fatmagul*, especially concerning the emphasis on romance and the protagonist overcoming obstacles. Results also suggest that viewers reject more realistic narratives presented by Brazilian telenovelas, which they consider too sexualized and not family-oriented.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Telenovelas are authentically Latin American. They started to be produced in the region during the 1950s as an adaptation of radionovelas to the brand-new technology of television (Martín-Barbero and Muñoz 1992). In the following decades, telenovelas acquired a particular style related to the social formation of each country, thus helping the construction of national identities (Martín-Barbero 1993). Furthermore, countries with established television industries, such as Brazil and Mexico, have been exporting telenovelas worldwide since the 1970s (Mazziotti 1996).

However, productions from another origin are now drawing attention globally. Turkish TV dramas (or *dizi*), which have a melodramatic narrative structure that resembles telenovelas, have been exported to 146 countries since the mid-2000s (Mourenza 2020). Turkey overcame Brazil and Mexico and is second only to the US in television exports (Bhutto 2019). The popularity of Turkish TV dramas represents a radical shift in the television landscape since they broke through the borders of Turkey's cultural-linguistic market and reached places culturally and geographically distant, such as Latin America.

In 2014, Chilean television network Mega was the first in Latin America to invest in Turkish "telenovelas" – the denomination they received after some adaptations to Latin American consumption habits, such as shorter episodes and daily broadcasts. Back then, Chilean television was going through a period of economic crisis, so instead of producing telenovelas like its competitors, Mega decided to air *One Thousand and One Nights* (*Binbir Gece*), a Turkish TV drama that combined a high-quality technical production with fewer expenses (Ashley 2019). Surprisingly, *One Thousand and One Nights* was the most-viewed TV program that year (Tali 2016). The second place was taken by *What is Fatmagul's Fault?* (*Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?*), another Turkish TV drama aired by Mega (Lopes and Orozco-Gómez 2015).

The impressive debut of Turkish TV dramas in Chile influenced the expansion of the phenomenon in Latin America. In 2015, six Turkish "telenovelas" were aired in Argentina, eleven in Chile, two in Ecuador, four in the United States,<sup>1</sup> seven in Peru, and six in Uruguay (Lopes and Orozco-Gómez 2015). Brazil also followed the trend, and the television network Band (short for *Rede Bandeirantes*) started to air *One Thousand and One Nights* during primetime that same year.

1 I refer to the Spanish-language television networks focused on Latin American audiences.

Band remained behind its competitors, but audience ratings that until then did not surpass one point quickly jumped to three points (Uol 2015b). These numbers encouraged Band to air *What is Fatmagul's Fault?* later that year, and it reached five points in audience ratings (Uol 2016). Between 2015 and 2019, Band aired seven Turkish TV dramas, with a brief break of three months in 2017, when Band produced a national version of the Turkish reality show *Exathlon*. However, *What is Fatmagul's Fault?* prevailed as the most successful one in terms of audience ratings.

In light of the remarkable popularity of Turkish TV dramas in Brazil, this article investigates a niche Brazilian audience's perception of *What is Fatmagul's Fault?* My research questions are 1. how is this foreign narrative related to the context of Brazilian audiences' daily lives? and 2. what differences and similarities Brazilian audiences see between Turkish and Brazilian productions regarding the narrative content? Discussions about the melodramatic structure, Brazilian telenovela, and transnational media flows support this analysis. Even though the results cannot be extended to all Turkish TV dramas aired in the country, I expect to shed some light on the rise of these productions in Brazil and Latin America.

## 2. MELODRAMA

Latin American telenovelas and Turkish TV dramas tend to portray narratives emphasizing emotions and moral values. These characteristics are associated with melodrama's classical structure, whose roots go back to France in the 18th century: popular theaters were banned for causing too much tumult, and only plays without dialogues were allowed for the working class, thus motivating the intense use of music, sound effects, exaggerated acting and, foremost, the appeal to sensations and feelings. The result was a spectacle that distanced itself from the theater considered refined, based on verbal rhetoric and literature (Martín-Barbero 1993).

Over the centuries, the melodramatic structure was reproduced in other cultural products. It is possible to identify melodrama's influence on narratives due to two basic operations: schematization and polarization (Martín-Barbero 1993). The first operation, schematization, can be described by characters' emptying of psychological depth. Characters are converted to mere archetypes, such as "the betrayer", "the avenger", "the victim" and "the fool". The second operation, polarization, refers to the Manichaeism of the melodramatic narrative. Melodrama shows a constant confrontation be-

tween “good” and “evil” that culminates in justice in favor of good, reinforcing a set of values that have to be followed by society to maintain its order (Thomasseau 1984).

The moral universe of melodrama creates a melodramatic imagination that merges the drama of morality with everyday life (Brooks 1995). Melodrama had multiple offshoots around the world that spread this melodramatic imagination. Therefore, the genre can reach past cultural differences since audiences in different cultural-linguistic contexts are acquainted with melodrama’s formula (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005). By knowing the rules, they can anticipate the protagonist’s fate, identify the hidden intentions of the villains, and be sure true love will triumph, for example. Instead of ruining the suspense, this is considered something that connects the viewer to the story (Oroz 1999).

In Brazil, the telenovela is the most remarkable example of a contemporary product derived from melodrama’s classical structure. The format has undergone radical changes over the years, but it keeps some melodramatic characteristics.

### 3. TELENOVELA IN BRAZIL

The television was launched in Brazil in 1950, and the first telenovela, *Your Life Belongs to Me (Sua Vida Me Pertence)*, was aired between 1951 and 1952 by TV Tupi. It was an almost literal adaptation of radionovela’s melodramatic script to television (Mattos 1990). Brazilian telenovelas only detached from radio’s influence in the 1960s due to the emergence of videotape, which allowed productions to be aired daily and commercialized (Mazziotti 1996).

In the mid-1960s, during the beginning of the military dictatorship, television started to establish itself as a mass medium. In this context, the television network Rede Globo, founded in 1965, grew thanks to the friendly relations with the military, soon leading the Brazilian television market and becoming the largest producer of telenovelas (Lopes 2003).

The 1970s consolidated the telenovela as the most popular and lucrative Brazilian cultural product. To function as a showcase of national modernity and ideals to be followed, Brazilian telenovela acquired a particular style close to the country’s social formation. Despite keeping ties with melodrama’s classical structure, Brazilian telenovelas broke with the rigor of the Manichean narratives and archetypal characters, incorporating more realism (Martín-Barbero and Muñoz 1992). This innovation was introduced by *Beto Rockfeller*, produced and aired by TV Tupi in 1968, which presented a pro-

tagonist that was not entirely good nor entirely evil and promoted discussions about contemporary themes (Hamburger 2005). Rede Globo adopted and improved *Beto Rockfeller*’s formula, turning the combination between the archaic and the modern into a striking feature of the Brazilian telenovela (Lopes 2009).

The industrialization of the telenovela allowed Globo to replace U.S. imports with national productions in its programming, including during primetime (Martín-Barbero 1993). Moreover, Globo’s telenovelas entered the international market and reversed the usual direction of transnational media flows – until then, television fiction was produced and distributed by a few developed countries and consumed by the rest of the world (Hamburger 2005).

In the 1990s, Globo institutionalized “social merchandising”, a strategy to include explicit pedagogical messages in telenovelas. Thus, problematic subjects were not merely represented: there was an intentional effort to promote information through the plot and educate the viewers (Mazziotti 2006). Over the years, subjects addressed by Globo’s telenovelas have ranged from mental health, racism, domestic violence, and migration to human cloning (Lopes 2009). More recently, aligned with current debates in Brazilian society, telenovelas present discussions about gender identity and homosexuality through characters who distance themselves from stereotypes and clichés. Some examples are the elderly lesbian couple from *Ambitious Women (Babilônia)*, aired in 2015, and the transgender men’s pregnancy in *Edge of Desire (A Força do Querer)*, broadcast in 2017. These initiatives received backlash from some segments of society, such as evangelical politicians, who argued that Globo’s telenovelas want to “destroy families” (Uol 2015c).

Perhaps as a reaction to these transformations in Globo’s telenovelas, more conservative narratives are emerging. RecordTV, a television network owned by Edir Macedo, the founder of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, has been producing biblical telenovelas since 2015. *Moses and the Ten Commandments (Os Dez Mandamentos)*, the first biblical telenovela aired by RecordTV, was based on Moses’ story and tripled the television network’s primetime audience ratings (The Guardian 2015). *Moses and the Ten Commandments* even overtook Globo’s first position in audience ratings when the episode of the parting of the Red Sea was broadcast (Uol 2015a). Meanwhile, SBT has been producing children’s telenovelas since 2012. These telenovelas are mostly remakes of Mexican scripts and are broadcast during primetime to target families (Carabet 2016). Amid

these changes, Band – which stopped producing telenovelas in 2008 and since then has been broadcasting foreign productions – brought Turkish TV dramas to its primetime programming in 2015.

Even though audiences tend to prefer national or local productions, melodrama's classical structure can work as a strategy to reach audiences within other cultures. This strategy is used by Globo's productions to some extent and now seems to be used by some Turkish TV dramas to boost transnational media flows.

#### 4. TRANSNATIONAL FLOWS AND CULTURAL PROXIMITY

The notion of cultural proximity proposed by Straubhaar (1991) states that audiences tend to prefer local or national content. When this preference cannot be met, usually because the country does not have economic and professional resources to produce television fiction, audiences look for productions from the same cultural-linguistic market. It means that they prefer productions from countries that share linguistic, historical, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and geographical similarities (Sinclair 1996).

One example of this preference are the exports of telenovelas between Latin American countries: audiences seem to prefer productions from other countries in the region, which have similar cultures, than from the United States. Audiences tend to choose productions from the United States only when it comes to genres that are too expensive to produce even for countries with a consolidated television industry, such as action series or feature films (Straubhaar 1991).

However, this process is also influenced by cultural aspects and trends that may operate at a national level or within subnational or specific groups. Straubhaar (2007) adds that other factors influencing audiences' choices are genre proximity, value proximity and thematic proximity.

La Pastina and Straubhaar (2005) illustrate the multiple proximities within audiences' reception by exploring the success of Mexican telenovela *Marimar* in a small rural community in northeastern Brazil, even while *King of Cattle (Rei Do Gado)*, a Globo production about a rural setting, was being aired. These viewers had traditional moral values better represented in Mexican telenovelas than in Brazilian ones, mainly because *Marimar* was strongly associated with melodrama's classical structure.

Telenovelas generally rely on melodrama's structures and archetypes, but some of them are closer to the original formula. Mexican telenovelas are centered on universal themes and portray one-dimensional characters, while Brazilian telenovelas introduce more realism (Mazziotti 2006). Therefore, Mexican telenovelas provide content that does not challenge viewers' values and beliefs, attracting conservative audiences (La Pastina and Straubhaar 2005).

Erasing certain elements that are too specific within a cultural-linguistic market is a strategy to make productions more exportable. Straubhaar describes this process as "delocalization": it consists of "minimizing certain kinds of cultural specificities in a cultural product for export to lower the possibility of a cultural discount by the foreign audience" (2007: 171). Cultural discounts include references, pacing, visuals, and jokes that foreign audiences are unfamiliar with.

As many cultures are familiar with melodrama, the flow of content influenced by the melodramatic structure is facilitated by the genre proximity. In the case of Turkish TV dramas, although they tend to focus on domestic viewers, the melodramatic structure seems to help their expansion among international audiences.

#### 5. TURKISH TV DRAMAS

In the late 1990s, Turkish television saw a significant rise in the local production of fictional dramas (Yesil 2015). Thanks to the development of the national TV industry, exports gradually increased until Turkish TV dramas had their global breakthrough: in 2008, the pan-Arab network MBC broadcast *Silver (Gümüş)* and achieved outstanding audience ratings (Salamandra 2012). Afterward, the popularity of Turkish TV dramas rapidly expanded to the rest of the world, including regions that shared no cultural or linguistic ties with Turkey.

Interestingly, the global success of Turkish TV dramas was a surprise to Turkish TV executives as they were focused on producing content for the domestic market (Algan 2020). To increase the international marketability of their products, producers adopted a strategy aligned with the delocalization through "the presence of melodramatic storylines and universal themes, and the de-emphasis on national identity along with the market reorientation" (Yesil 2015: 52).

This expansion has motivated research on narratives presented by Turkish TV dramas, the perceptions of audiences within various cultural-linguistic markets, and the sociopolitical consequences of this phenomenon. Works approaching

the popularity of Turkish TV dramas in the Middle East and North Africa highlighted that these productions contributed to positioning Turkey as a cultural, political, and economic power in the region (Salamandra 2012; Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi 2013; Yanardağoğlu and Karam 2013; Anaz 2014; Berg 2017; Ozalpman and Sarikakis 2018). Similarly, works investigating the success of Turkish TV dramas in the Balkans, where the first productions started to be aired between 2008 and 2009, emphasized that Turkish TV dramas are creating curiosity about the Turkish lifestyle, constructing better views towards Turkey, and even improving diplomatic relations (Panjeta 2014; Balaban 2015; Aydos 2017).

More recently, works have been exploring the phenomenon of Turkish TV dramas in Latin America. There, the positive results achieved by these productions are attributed to the changing television landscape and the audience identification with the melodramatic structure as Turkish TV dramas offer familiar narratives portrayed in “exotic” scenarios (Ferreira 2017, Ferreira 2021, Weber Imaral 2021; Ashley 2019; Aslan 2020; Valverde 2020; Cassano Iturri 2021; Antezana Barrios et al. 2021).

*What is Fatmagul's fault?* is a prototypical example of a Turkish TV drama that closely follows this melodramatic structure. Produced by Ay Yapım and aired by Kanal D, it was originally broadcast in Turkey between 2010 and 2012. By 2013, the series was already bought by thirty-seven countries around the world (Williams 2013), becoming an international hit in the following years.

## 6. FATMAGUL IN BRAZIL

*What is Fatmagul's fault?* (*Fatmağül'ün Suçu Ne?*) is centered on the story of Fatmagul Ketenci, a rape survivor fighting for justice. Initially, Fatmagul lives in a small village on the Aegean coast with her brother, Rahmi, her sister-in-law, Mukaddes, and her nephew, Murat. She is engaged to the fisherman Mustafa Nalçalı, and they plan to marry and move into a house they are building.

Fatmagul's dreams are tragically interrupted when she goes to the beach to see Mustafa before his departure on a fishing trip. She is raped by Selim Yaşaran, the son of a rich and influential businessman, his cousin Erdoğan and their friend Vural, who also comes from an upper-class family. Kerim Ilgaz, a friend from a humble background, was also present and, despite not directly taking part in the abuse, did not intervene to stop it.

The next day, Fatmagul is found unconscious by Ebe Nine, Kerim's adoptive mother. Her life then turns into a nightmare: beyond the trauma, she also has to deal with village inhabitants discrediting her accusations, Mustafa blaming her for what happened, crime perpetrators threatening her with their social influence, and her own family discouraging her from reporting the crime. On top of that, Mukaddes is bribed by the Yaşaran family and forces Fatmagul to marry Kerim. Kerim takes the blame for his wealthy friends out of remorse – he was under the effect of drugs on the night of the crime and believes he raped Fatmagul too. After the wedding, the couple and their respective families move to Istanbul to start a new life somewhere no one knows about the incident. Nevertheless, Fatmagul still finds the strength to seek justice, both for herself and for other victims of sexual violence. Kerim supports her fight and, as time goes by, they fall in love.

In Brazil, the controversially romantic perspective of Fatmagul's story inspired a new title for the drama: *Fatmagul: A Força Do Amor*, or, translated to English, *Fatmagul: The Strength of Love*. Other adaptations concerned the episodes' duration and frequency, which went from 90 minutes once a week to 50 minutes six times a week, and the soundtrack, which included a song from Brazilian *sertanejo* duo Bruno & Marrone as Kerim and Fatmagul's theme. After these adjustments, *Fatmagul*, as the TV drama was often called in the country, was aired by Band between August 2015 and April 2016.

*Fatmagul* achieved popularity not only on television but also online. On Twitter, *Fatmagul*'s official account would post tweets about episodes in real-time, which engaged followers. *Fatmagul*'s official Facebook page had almost 340,000 likes, and posts also engaged followers. Besides, fans created many Facebook groups dedicated to *Fatmagul*. In these groups, viewers discussed episodes, shared content related to other Turkish TV dramas, and posted fan productions, such as fanarts and fanfics. There were even groups that promoted offline meetings among members. In the next section, I explain the methods used to understand the rise of *Fatmagul* in Brazil.

## 7. METHODS

Researching reception requires thinking production and consumption articulated to mediations of familiar daily life, subjectivity, fictional genre, and technological devices (Lopes 2000). To contemplate this complex web of interactions, I

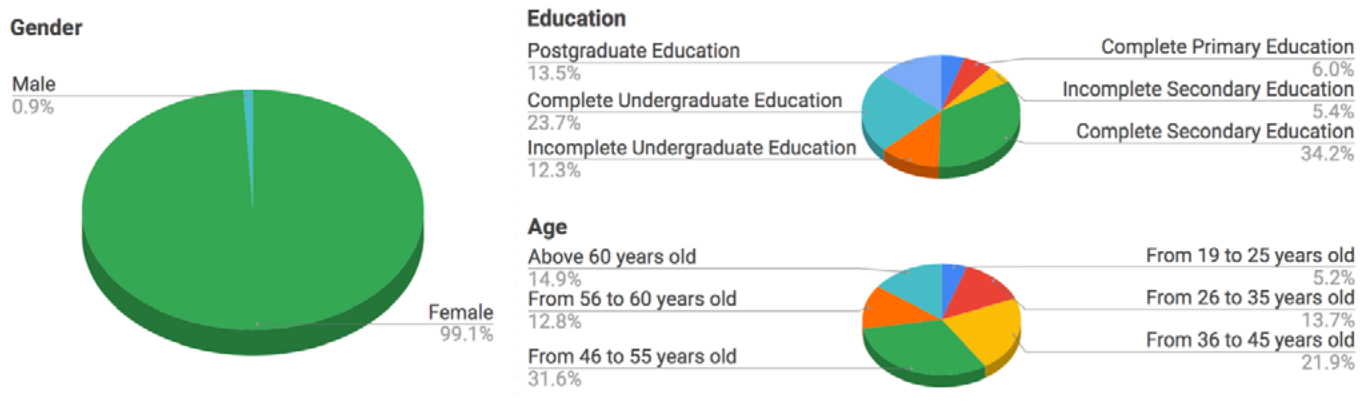


FIG. 1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF AUDIENCES

combined quantitative and qualitative methods through an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews.

I began by mapping Brazilian fan groups dedicated to Turkish TV dramas on Facebook. Afterward, I shared an online questionnaire comprising sixteen questions – eleven closed-ended and five open-ended – on these groups to gather data on the audience profile and general preferences (see Figure 1). The questionnaire was available from March 30, 2017, to April 20, 2017, and received 333 valid answers.

Data collected through the questionnaire provided relevant clues about the audience. For instance, almost all respondents were women, which corresponds to the industrial definition that categorizes telenovelas as TV programs for females: these productions tend to be grounded on melodrama’s excess, and feelings are culturally considered a part of the women’s world (Hamburger 2005). This scenario has been changing for Globo’s telenovelas as their productions distance themselves from the classic melodrama formula, and men comprise more than 30% of telenovelas’ audiences (Lopez & Orozco-Gomez 2017). It seems that either Turkish TV dramas have a stronger appeal among women, or male audiences are not active in the fan groups. Additionally, the fact that most respondents are above 36 years old suggests that these women grew up during the expansion of the Brazilian TV industry and the hegemony of Rede Globo, thus being well-versed in the rules of melodrama and telenovelas (Hamburger 2005).

At the end of the questionnaire, respondents could provide their contact information if they wanted to further collaborate in the research. Among these respondents, five female volunteers from varied backgrounds were selected to represent the different education levels, age ranges, and regions that came up in the questionnaire (see Table 1). In-depth

interviews were conducted with each volunteer via video call between October 25, 2017, and October 30, 2017, to better understand their individual experiences with *Fatmagul*, Turkish TV dramas, and telenovelas in general.

Name <sup>2</sup>	Age group	Location (City/State)	Education
Ana	From 26 to 35 years old	Aracaju/SE	Incomplete Secondary Education
Maria	From 36 to 45 years old	São Paulo/SP	Complete Undergraduate Education
Luiza	From 36 to 45 years old	São Paulo/SP	Complete Undergraduate Education
Helena	From 56 to 60 years	Curitiba/PR	Complete Primary Education
Regina	Above 60 years old	Belo Horizonte/MG	Postgraduate

TABLE 1: VIEWERS SELECTED FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The data gathered through the questionnaire and interviews revealed the perceptions about *Fatmagul* and Brazilian telenovelas. Besides, aspects concerning new consumption habits adopted by the Brazilian audience emerged.

## 8. BRAZILIAN TELENOVELAS VERSUS TURKISH TV DRAMAS

Almost 80% of questionnaire respondents and interviewees said that watching telenovelas is a common habit in their dai-

<sup>2</sup> All names are fictitious.

ly lives. This information reinforces the idea that they are acquainted with the consumption of this kind of television fiction and its rules. However, this does not mean that they watch any telenovela or the most popular ones: it was possible to identify a preference for telenovelas that follow a more traditional structure and a rejection of Globo's productions' realism and modernity.

When questioned about the usual time they watch telenovelas, the most mentioned time by both questionnaire respondents and interviewees was 8 pm. Since it is Brazilian primetime, this answer was expected, so it required further investigation to identify which of all the telenovelas broadcast at this time they were watching. *Band*, despite being in the fourth position in popularity in Brazil, was the favorite option for 81% of questionnaire respondents and all interviewees. On the other hand, although Globo is the leader in audience ratings in the country, only 7% of the questionnaire respondents claimed to watch its telenovelas.

In the in-depth interviews, it was possible to further investigate the rejection for Globo's telenovelas. Luiza, for example, explained that she started watching *Fatmagul* because other telenovelas aired at that time did not interest her, especially Globo's ones. For her, Globo's productions do not correspond to what is expected from a telenovela:

No, I don't like Globo's telenovelas. They've become so artificial for me, I don't know. Honestly, it doesn't please me. I think telenovelas have to be like telenovelas. SBT ones, which are mostly from Mexico, they're real telenovelas. Tearjerkers. (Luiza, personal communication, October 28, 2017)<sup>3</sup>

Ana also watches Mexican telenovelas aired on SBT during the evening. She refuses to watch Globo's telenovelas: "I don't like Globo's telenovelas. They're not educational. Too much spiritism, too much sex. Well, how can I say it... Too many messages about homosexuality." Luiza, Ana, Helena, and Regina all agreed that Globo's telenovelas are too explicit when it comes to sex. Regina, who works as an educator, thought it was inappropriate to show certain scenes of intimacy on television. In her opinion, this excessive exposition ends up banalizing sex and affection, and negatively influences children that might be watching it. Ana complemented this idea:

[...] Brazilian telenovela is too pornographic, too much pornography. Here in Brazil, virginity is out of fashion. A teen who is a virgin is an outcast, do you understand me? This is what telenovelas convey. (Ana, personal communication, October 18, 2017)

The women interviewed did not feel comfortable watching Globo's telenovelas with family members. Regina, for example, commented she often felt like "sinking through the floor" because of sex scenes shown while she was watching it with her elderly brother-in-law. In contrast, Helena said she could watch *Fatmagul* accompanied by her autistic son since she considered it lighter than Globo's telenovelas. Similarly, Luiza told us she watched the TV drama with her 70-year-old mother and her 19-year-old nephew. She detailed her experience:

[...] *Fatmagul* talked about a very delicate issue, that is, sexual abuse and the victim-blaming women suffer after being abused, but it wasn't something heavy. I didn't feel embarrassed watching it with my 70-year-old mother, or with my nephew, who is 19 years old. The difference you see between *Fatmagul* and some Brazilian telenovelas is that you feel embarrassed. Even in kissing scenes, you think: "well, does it have to be this way?" Of course, we know it happens like that in real life, but it's a telenovela, something supposed to be watched with your family, with someone by your side, and you feel embarrassed watching it... I really don't watch them. It's not like "oh, you have too much pudency". I think everything needs limits. And Turkish telenovelas, they are more respectful. They make you imagine what's going to happen, but they don't show it explicitly, you know? It's not necessary to show, excuse my French, the actor with his butt out, you know? You just imagine it happening. (Luiza, personal communication, October 28, 2017)

All other interviewees praised this "lightness" mentioned by Luiza and Helena. Maria, who thought she would not bear to continue watching *Fatmagul* after the rape scene, changed her mind in the following episodes. For her, the TV drama transformed a tragedy into something optimistic, and showed that if you have support from your loved ones you can overcome your traumas. Meanwhile, Ana and Regina thought the TV drama was not as heavy as Globo's telenove-

3 Interviews were conducted in Portuguese. All translations are mine.

las because of the tenderness of Fatmagul and Kerim's relationship. According to Ana, their intimacy evolved gradually, through touches and kisses on the cheeks. For Regina, the fact that the couple only had intercourse by the end of the TV drama got back the idea that sex should be something special.

These arguments suggest that questionnaire respondents and interviewees are more conservative and prefer telenovelas that reflect their moral values instead of questioning them. This hypothesis was reinforced by the answers concerning their favorite themes in *Fatmagul*.

## 9. FATMAGUL'S MELODRAMATIC STRUCTURE

One of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire asked what interested people the most in *Fatmagul*. Answers were varied, but I was able to divide them into five categories: Fatmagul's overcoming, the fight for justice, the romance between Fatmagul and Kerim, the opportunity to get to know another culture, and the actors' good performance. Aspects related to the first three categories were the most mentioned by questionnaire respondents.

In the in-depth interviews, interviewees showed they were able to project issues presented by *Fatmagul* to their daily lives. Despite being a foreign narrative, they considered the portrayal of violence against women, rape culture, and *machismo* in Turkish society close to the Brazilian reality. Ana, for example, said it seems that women in Turkey and Brazil do not have the right to wear whatever they like because men believe a woman's value can be measured by their clothes or their behavior and will use this to justify violence. However, this proximity to Brazilian culture was not what caught their attention. As in the questionnaire, interviewees emphasized their interest in Fatmagul's capacity to rebuild her life, her struggle to achieve justice, and her love story with Kerim. These three categories of interest in *Fatmagul*'s storyline are associated with melodrama's classical structure: the persecution from the villains against the heroine, the final justice for the good ones, and the true love able to overcome all the obstacles.

As pointed out by Martín-Barbero (1993), melodrama relies on schematization and polarization, thus using archetypal characters and Manichean storylines. In this context, Fatmagul's archetype can be classified as "the heroine": although suffering the rape and the consequences that followed the crime, she stands firm to her principles and re-

mains good, pure, and virtuous. The villains, who represent evil and persecute her throughout the narrative, are Selim, Erdoğan, and Vural, the men who raped her, Mustafa, her abusive ex-fiancé, and Mukaddes, her greedy sister-in-law. The firsts go unpunished after committing the crime thanks to their influential connections and money and try to stop Fatmagul from reporting them through corruption, manipulation, and cruelty. The second one blames Fatmagul for being raped, sets their house on fire, and decides to take revenge on her for ruining their wedding plans and humiliating him before the whole village. The third negotiates Fatmagul's silence with the crime perpetrators' family in exchange for money and constantly sabotages the relationship between Fatmagul and Kerim because of her jealousy. The heroine fights tirelessly against all of these villains throughout the episodes, and in the end, they are punished for everything they did to harm her and her loved ones. Vural is accidentally killed by Mustafa, Mustafa kills himself, Selim and Erdoğan are condemned for their crimes, and Mukaddes is also convicted.

For Maria, Fatmagul's transformation from a scared girl into a confident and brave woman while overcoming her traumas and facing her enemies was one of the aspects that interested her the most. This shift was also highlighted by Regina, who commented that, despite looking not older than 18 years old, Fatmagul endured so much suffering in her life that she was forced to mature. Regarding the final scene, in which a pregnant Fatmagul, walking around her hometown holding hands with Kerim, says that many other women around Turkey have been victims of sexual abuse and are still waiting for justice, Regina opined:

I really, really liked it! Her speech about the other cases she was still seeing around her, in other cities, and making a call for other women to do the same thing as she did... Because these women come from a Muslim culture in which they have to shut up... But that wasn't her case. She blew the whistle, right? She rebelled against it [...] (Regina, personal communication, October 31, 2017)

However, this final scene – which resembles Globo's social merchandising actions – did not please everyone. Luiza said she understood the message intended but would rather see the couple with their baby already born, enjoying life as a family. Ana and the questionnaire respondents made similar comments, which seems to indicate a preference for the



representation of an ideal nuclear family. In telenovelas' endings, children and pregnancy symbolize a long-lasting love (Almeida 2007).

The relationship between Fatmagul and Kerim may come across as controversial since he witnessed her rape without interfering and then they were forced to marry, but it was one of the favorite aspects of *Fatmagul* to both interviewees and questionnaire respondents. To them, Kerim truly regretted what he did, and through his sincere love, he achieved forgiveness.

Fatmagul and Kerim's relationship had a slow development. In the beginning, Fatmagul could not stand Kerim's presence, but he patiently waited until she believed in his good intentions. Even when Fatmagul was rude to him, Kerim kept an affectionate, respectful, supportive, and loyal attitude toward her. After some time, Fatmagul forgave him, and they fell in love – a love that was pure and strong enough to sustain their relationship even with so many obstacles along the way. According to melodrama's rules, this feeling existent between these two characters is defined as a "good" or "ordered" love (Oroz 1999), which is different from passion, considered a "bad" or "disordered" love and reserved to the villains (Thomasseau 1984). The obsession Mustafa has for Fatmagul, for example, could be interpreted as a "bad" love.

"Good" love is usually something the viewers aim to experience in their lives (Guimarães and França 2007). This could explain why there was such identification from the questionnaire respondents and interviewees with the romance between Fatmagul and Kerim. Ana commented about this interest for the aspects that compound the idea of a "good" love:

What delighted me the most was the story, because it conveyed a pure love. There was no making out, kissing, grabbing, no, he won her with patience, romanticism, affection. He had everything to leave and live his life away from her. But love found its way. (Ana, personal communication, October 18, 2017)

Luiza was also fascinated by Kerim's redemption. In her opinion, he expressed deep regret:

The way Kerim fought to show Fatmagul he truly loved her. The way he showed that, even though she forgave him, he didn't forgive himself for what he did to the woman he found himself in love with. It really, how can I say it, caught my attention, the way he... Of course, it's a telenovela, but the way he

tried to show her "look, you hate me, you despise me, but I love you". He didn't give up on showing this to her. Even though he didn't forgive himself, and besides everything he went through, all the humiliations she made him go through – which I think he deserved – he didn't give up, you know? He fought for the love he was feeling for her [...] (Luiza, personal communication, October 28, 2017)

These perceptions reinforce the idea the participants are conservative. They prefer traditional narratives and reject recent changes in the approach to romantic relationships, sexuality, gender relations, and family structure in Brazilian telenovelas. Their perceptions also suggest that the Turkish television industry's strategy of employing melodrama's classical structure to reach other cultural-linguistic markets is being successful. Viewers seem to be mostly relating to universal themes instead of particularities of Turkey.

However, the inclination for melodrama does not mean *Fatmagul's* audience is outdated. Thanks to *Fatmagul* and other Turkish TV dramas, they are adopting new consumption habits that impact their daily lives.

## 10. CHANGES IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION HABITS

Although the majority of questionnaire respondents were above 45 years old, almost 74% of all participants claimed to watch *Fatmagul's* episodes on the internet. This information shows that online watching, often associated with younger audiences (Matrix 2007), is not restricted to these viewers, and reinforces what was pointed out as a trend in television fiction in the past decade: the consumption of television fiction on the internet (Lopes and Orozco-Gómez 2017).

In the in-depth interviews, all interviewees claimed to have adopted the habit of watching Turkish TV dramas online, and this practice turned into a part of their daily lives. They also mentioned binge-watching *Fatmagul* and other Turkish TV dramas, which was another trend in television fiction in the 2010s (Lopes and Orozco-Gómez 2017), even though also generally linked with the generations that were already born digital. Regina, who belonged to the eldest age group – above 60 years old –, said she first watched *Fatmagul* on television and re-watched it a few times on YouTube. She described her routine with Turkish TV dramas and justified her marathon-viewing:

I make my crafts, my stuff, and the television is always on, so sometimes I watch 8, 10 episodes in a day, you know? This is how I do it. Nowadays, there's no way you can watch Globo News, or Band News, our television is a police and political duty. All the time it shows politicians in prison, or thugs in prison, or leaving prison... So I'm done with it. I don't have the patience for it anymore. (Regina, personal communication, October 31, 2017)

After *Fatmagul's* broadcast on Band, Regina, as well as the other women interviewed, deepened their interest in Turkish TV dramas through online fan groups. All of them mentioned watching *Eternal* (Ölene Kadar) – originally aired by Turkish television network ATV in 2017 and not aired in Brazil – thanks to these virtual communities, since there was an effort to translate it to Portuguese as soon as English translations were available. However, some of them – such as Maria, Ana, and Luiza – got so anxious that they did not care to wait for subtitles and watched *Eternal* live through ATV's app. Needless to say, none of them understood the Turkish language, but maybe because of melodrama's predictable structure this did not matter:

It was very nice, we had a very nice group on the internet, on Facebook. Every Thursday [...] we watched it in Turkish. We didn't understand a thing, but we watched it anyway. And it was very nice because when the episode ended, we tried to guess what happened together in our group. Then, on Sunday, or Saturday, I think she [the woman who added subtitles] received English subtitles and translated it, and then on Saturday, she posted Thursday's episode translated. So we watched it on Thursday in Turkish and on Sunday we watched it with Portuguese subtitles. But there are many things that you can understand since it's a story you are following. You can sort of guess what's happening. We got wrong about one thing or another, but we could understand almost everything intuitively. (Maria, personal communication, October 26, 2017)

Maria and Luiza explained that the bonds between group members became so strong that they started to organize charitable actions, such as donating blood and joining the

bone marrow registry, in a way to homage Engin Akyürek, the actor who played Kerim in *Fatmagul* and starred *Eternal*. Fans who lived in São Paulo met offline for these activities, and also to eat Turkish dishes at a restaurant owned by a family of Turkish immigrants. Maria said it reminds her of *Gül Mutfağı*, *Fatmagul's* restaurant in the TV drama. The women became friends with the owners, who now allow their Engin Akyürek-themed parties at the place. At these meetings, some of the fans wear personalized T-shirts printed with a photo of the actor.

These viewers' obsession with Turkish "telenovelas" is often compared to adolescents' behavior by their acquaintances, who are not used to seeing people their age so involved with a TV drama. After these types of comments, Luiza, at the height of her 40s, answers: "so I'm 14 years old". Even though the participants are more conservative concerning the changes in television fiction themes and narratives, they seem open-minded when it comes to embracing digital trends. As a result, Turkish TV dramas are deeply entangled in their daily lives.

## 11. CONCLUSION

Based on our sample, *Fatmagul's* audience seems to be mainly made up of women who seek productions that reflect their conservative moral values through melodrama's classical structure. In *Fatmagul*, the participants were mostly interested in the protagonist overcoming obstacles, the fight for justice, and the romance – all elements of melodrama, a genre people can relate to despite their culture. Rede Globo's telenovelas, which tend to be more realistic and approach Brazilian social issues instead of following a traditional formula, are rejected by the participants.

Even though *Fatmagul's* viewers dislike narrative innovations and feel nostalgic toward classic telenovelas, they embrace technological innovations. Through the internet, they have adopted new media consumption habits and turned Turkish TV dramas into an important part of their daily lives. Their practices approximate the global and the local, the individual and the collective, and the online and the offline.

Furthermore, the analysis of the reception of *Fatmagul* in Brazil suggests that Turkish TV dramas are popular among a specific niche. These productions are not replacing national telenovelas nor threatening Globo's hegemony – Globo remains as the main TV network in Brazil, and Band is still behind its competitors. Based on the responses in the question-

naire and interviews, Turkish TV dramas seem to be gaining a small parcel of the audience unsatisfied with other options available in Brazilian television. It points to a fragmentation of audiences, a process that is likely related to the diversity of content currently available on television and the internet.

In 2019, Band stopped broadcasting Turkish TV dramas. Due to the lack of options, Brazilian fans developed communities that translate, subtitle, and distribute Turkish TV dramas online without any monetary profit. These communities attract not only viewers that already watched Turkish TV dramas on television but also new viewers. Additionally, Globoplay – Globo’s streaming service – added Fatmagul and other Turkish TV dramas to their catalog in July 2021. There are also Turkish TV dramas available on Netflix and HBO Max. These transformations contribute to the fast-growing popularity of Turkish TV dramas in Brazil: more titles are available, online groups have thousands of members, and audiences are likely getting more diverse. Therefore, to understand the perceptions and appropriations of Turkish narratives in Brazil and Latin America, this ongoing phenomenon requires further investigation.

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## TV series

- Ambitious Women* (2015)  
*Beto Rockfeller* (1968–1969)  
*Edge of Desire* (2017)  
*King of Cattle* (1996-1997)  
*Marimar* (1994)  
*Ölene Kadar* (2017)  
*One Thousand and One Nights* (2006–2009)  
*Moses and the Ten Commandments* (2015–2016)  
*What is Fatmagul's Fault?* (2010–2012)  
*Silver* (2005–2007)







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